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Sustainable development: International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

Implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The recent major disasters in Asia attest to the fact that much more needs to be done to invest in, and systematically implement, disaster risk reduction. Over three years have passed since the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters and, although progress has been made on a variety of fronts, the world is not on track to achieve the Hyogo Framework's sought-after outcome of a substantial reduction in disaster losses by 2015. A major scaling-up of efforts and resources is therefore needed urgently.

The present report provides an overview of progress on the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, in response to General Assembly resolutions 62/192, 61/199 and 61/200. It also considers trends in disasters and disaster risks, and the development of coordination, guidance and resourcing through the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction system. Details on the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action and international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon are contained in the annexes.

* A/63/150 and Corr.1.

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I. Trends in disasters and disaster risks

1. During the period July 2007-June 2008, a total of 364 disasters caused by natural hazards affected more than 212 million people, killed more than 240,000 and produced economic damage of more than $77 billion.[1] Compared to the previous reporting period, the number of people killed was 13 times higher and the economic costs more than doubled, though the number of people affected was similar. Multiple disaster events, such as the five consecutive cyclones in Madagascar and typhoons in the Philippines, made people who had already been affected very vulnerable in the face of each new disaster event. Cyclone Nargis, leaving around 140,000 people dead or missing in Myanmar and the Sichuan earthquake in China, with a death toll of over 87,000, were the most catastrophic events. Each underlined the importance of disaster risk reduction, particularly the need for effective people-centred early warning systems and earthquake resistant construction.

2. Disasters related to hydro-meteorological hazards, in particular floods and storms, have continued to rise over recent years. Over the period 2000-2007, their frequency increased by 8.4 per cent annually on average, and their average annual cost exceeded $80 billion, making up the largest source of disaster costs.[2] Those trends point to a growing problem of increased vulnerability related to climate risks, particularly for the poorest countries, that needs the urgent attention of Member States.

3. The experience of Bangladesh demonstrated that disaster risk reduction, including response preparedness, can save lives and livelihoods when disaster strikes. Cyclone Sidr hit the most heavily populated low-lying area in the world, killing 3,400, leaving 1,000 people missing and millions without livelihoods. Although tragic, the losses were much less severe than those of a similar cyclone in 1970, which caused 300,000 deaths, and another in 1991, which killed 138,000 people. Analysis shows that this result is directly due to the efforts of the Government, supported by international partners. The Islamic Republic of Iran is another example where disaster risk reduction saved lives in 2007 during Cyclone Gonu.

4. Environmental degradation continues to be one of the main factors responsible for increased vulnerability to natural hazards. A global assessment study by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) showed that 20 per cent of the world's mangroves have been lost since 1980.[3] The losses were worst in Asia, where 1.9 million hectares of mangrove forests were destroyed by new shrimp and fish farms, tourist operations and other development aimed at supporting growing coastal populations, which made coastal areas more vulnerable to the impact of storms and cyclones. Worldwide, some 70 per cent of the 5.2 billion hectares of dry lands used for agriculture are already degraded and threatened by desertification. The world's highest rate of desertification is taking place in sub-Saharan Africa, where agricultural production is declining at the rate of almost 1 per cent per year.[4] To date, efforts to reduce drought risks and combat

[1] See EM-DAT: the International Disaster Database, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance/Centre for Research and Epidemiology of Disaster, July 2008.

[2] Centre for Research and Epidemiology of Disaster, 2008.

[3] FAO, *The World's Mangroves 1980-2005*, Forestry Paper 153 (Rome, 2007).

[4] FAO, *State of the World Forests 2007* (Rome, 2007).

deforestation have failed to stop rapid global forest loss, despite some localized successes.

5. In 2008, more than half of the world's human population, about 3.3 billion people, will be living in urban areas. By 2030, that number is expected to swell to almost five billion. The unprecedented scale of urban growth will be particularly notable in Africa and Asia, where urban populations will double between 2000 and 2030.[5] High population density, insufficient livelihoods, lack of access to basic services and other aspects of social vulnerability will place people at high disaster risk. Moreover, poorly planned mega-cities and other urban environments are often located in high risk areas for earthquakes, floods, landslides and other technological hazards.

6. Disaster statistics, continued environmental degradation, climate change and the growth of unplanned urban areas together point to a compelling need for the urgent scaling-up of the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disaster.[6]

7. The Bali Action Plan of the Framework Convention on Climate Change[7] now includes specific language on disaster risk reduction, calling for enhanced action on disaster risk reduction strategies to lessen the impact of disasters on developing countries, and on risk management strategies, including risk transfer mechanisms such as insurance. Those topics will be the subject of a formal workshop at the fourteenth session of the Conference of the Parties, to be held in Poznan, Poland, from 1 to 12 December 2008. At the climate change negotiations in Bonn in June 2008, parties recommended the inclusion of disaster risk reduction strategies and the Hyogo Framework for Action in national policies and programmes in the context of the Nairobi Work Programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change.

II. Reduction of vulnerability to severe climate-related hazards

8. In response to General Assembly resolution 61/200, the Strategy secretariat has engaged the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), regional organizations and individual Governments in several workshops and high-level policy forums to gain better understanding among policymakers of the benefits of linking existing frameworks for risk reduction to climate change adaptation and poverty reduction. Advocacy efforts included high-level policy dialogues with parliamentarians and collaboration with the European Parliament and the Global Legislators Organization for a Balanced Environment. The League of Arab States adopted disaster risk reduction as a key component of climate change adaptation for the Arab Regional Framework Action Plan for Climate Change. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kampala in November 2007 adopted the Lake Victoria Climate Change Action Plan, advocating greater financial support for climate change adaptation and better disaster management on the basis of the prior

[5] United Nations Population Fund, *State of the World Population 2007* (New York, 2007).

[6] A/CONF.206/6 and Corr.1, chap. I, resolution 2.

[7] Adopted by the Conference of Parties at its thirteenth session, held in Bali from 3 to 15 December 2007 (FCCC/CP/2007/6/Add.1, decision 1/CP.13).

recommendation of the African Ministers' Council on Water to prioritize the Hyogo Framework for Action as a part of the urgent action required on climate change. UNDP has developed a programming framework to climate-proof the Millennium Development Goals and started a pilot Climate Risk Management Technical Support Project in four countries (Armenia, Ecuador, Indonesia and Mozambique) aimed to build in-country capacity to analyse risks related to climate variability and change and to define risk management solutions.

9. In response to General Assembly resolution 61/199 on international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Governments of Ecuador and Spain and the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction have helped to consolidate the Guayaquil-based International Research Centre on the El Niño Phenomenon, and its role in the Western South America region (see annex II).

III. Progress made in implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action*

A. Progress at the national level

10. Increased commitment by Governments, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders has resulted in some good progress — although still limited — in implementing disaster risk reduction in many parts of the world. This is manifested through a number of countries adopting instruments to guide policy and enact legislation for risk reduction, while others have integrated risk reduction into their national development plans or poverty reduction strategies.

11. At present, 45 States have established multi-stakeholder national platforms for disaster risk reduction and at least 10 more are in advanced stage of preparation. A total of 120 Governments have designated official focal points for the implementation, follow-up and monitoring of progress of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

12. Despite that positive trend, financial and human resources are often scarce and it remains a challenge for many countries to sustain their multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism or make real investment in risk reduction measures beyond strategies and institutional coordination, with appropriate legal backing.

B. Progress at the regional level

13. Several regional organizations have adopted resolutions and realigned strategies in support of the Hyogo Framework for Action. The Strategy secretariat increased its regional presence to further develop regional partnerships, support regional and national disaster risk reduction mainstreaming efforts and platforms and develop region-specific information and knowledge products. The partnership between the Strategy secretariat and the World Bank contributed to enhanced collaboration with regional organizations on disaster risk reduction.

* See annex I for additional information.

C. Progress at the international level

14. The Strategy secretariat continued to facilitate and promote the engagement of numerous partners in disaster risk reduction in a coordinated manner. Specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations continued to enhance their own commitments to the Hyogo Framework for Action. The UNDP Strategic Plan (2008-2011) urges UNDP to continue to extend its support to programme countries within the context of the Hyogo Framework for Action in close coordination with the Strategy secretariat. The World Food Programme (WFP) Strategic Plan (2008-2011) includes disaster risk reduction as a key objective. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council endorsed a new Medium-term Strategy (2010-2013), which identifies disasters and conflicts as one of six core priorities for the organization through 2013. In addition, work on disaster risk reduction will be integrated across all priority areas and is recognized as a central element of the work of UNEP on climate change adaptation. The thirtieth International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent adopted in November 2007 a declaration, resolving to integrate environmental degradation and adaptation to climate change in disaster risk reduction and disaster management policies and plans. The Red Cross/Red Crescent movement is reviewing its policy to promote longer-term community-based development approaches on risk reduction.

15. The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, a partnership between the World Bank and the Strategy, has contributed to the scaling-up of the World Bank's own commitment to mainstream disaster risk reduction into poverty reduction strategies and climate change adaptation, while providing technical assistance and seed resources for national programmes and recovery assessment and operations.

16. Key United Nations coordination mechanisms have taken action on disaster risk reduction, including linkages to climate change adaptation, in coordination with the Strategy — the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, the United Nations Development Group and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

D. Coordination and guidance by the Strategy system

17. As noted, Strategy stakeholders at all levels have a fundamental role in supporting the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action. Following the first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, held in Geneva in June 2007, the Strategy system was strengthened to provide better coordinated support and guidance to regional, national and local actors. The second session of the Global Platform, to be held in June 2009, will serve to initiate the mid-term review of the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action expected by 2010.

18. The Strategy system's joint work programme, undertaken by a core set of the Strategy system partners, is a concerted effort to contribute to international coordination and scaling-up of action.[9] Collaboration with other stakeholder networks and thematic platforms, such as the ProVention Consortium, provides additional support to the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action. In addition, I intend to appoint a new Assistant Secretary-General for disaster risk reduction.

19. An important activity set out in the Hyogo Framework for Action is to report on progress and monitor risk trends. The Strategy has established a global, regional and national reporting system with the partners, releasing a global assessment report every two years that are fed into the sessions of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction. This exercise constitutes a core function of the Strategy, with strong support from UNDP and the World Bank. The next report will be launched in May 2009. Baseline assessments have been undertaken in all regions and Governments are preparing national reports. A global risk update and in-depth case studies are undertaken by Strategy partners guided by technical and research institutions.

20. The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction regional offices played a catalytic role in mobilizing support to regional and national disaster risk reduction processes. The Strategy secretariat enhanced its presence in Africa, the Americas and Asia and the Pacific, which included new units in Addis Ababa, Johannesburg, South Africa and Kobe, Japan. New regional offices were established in Geneva and Cairo. Close to half of the Strategy secretariat resources are allocated to work in the regions.

21. The first meeting of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Scientific and Technical Committee was hosted by UNESCO in January 2008. It provided specific reviews aiming at ensuring a sound scientific base is available for ongoing Strategy system processes, including the preparations for the second session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction.

22. As requested by the Hyogo Framework for Action, the Strategy secretariat developed a set of generic indicators and an HFA-Monitor, online reporting tool for national authorities, available from www.unisdr.org, to measure progress in achieving disaster risk reduction goals.

23. In 2007, a comprehensive public web portal on disaster risk reduction, PreventionWeb (www.preventionweb.net), was launched by the Strategy secretariat. This tool aims to support national actors to enhance their knowledge and ability to undertake action. It links to relevant existing information sources and provides a venue for collaboration, dissemination of practical information including standards and guidelines, lessons learned and access to expertise, networks and tools, such as a virtual library on disaster risk reduction. It provides online communication tools such as e-mail groups and online workspaces.

[9] FAO, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNDP, UNEP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP, the World Health Organization (WHO), WMO and the World Bank.

E. Investing in disaster risk reduction

24. A substantial increase in investment in disaster risk reduction worldwide is urgently required if the goals and objectives of the Hyogo Framework for Action are to be attained by 2015. While some progress has been made, the magnitude of resources available for disaster risk reduction falls well short of that required to ensure that the resilience of nations and communities is built.

25. The United Nations and the World Bank have jointly initiated an assessment on the economics of disaster risk reduction, in order to provide a sounder evidence base for raising awareness and political commitment for disaster risk reduction, and to provide guidance on options for investment and interventions. The results will be available in 2009.

26. A number of donor countries, including Australia, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, are enhancing policies for the integration of disaster risk reduction into their development and humanitarian funding programmes. Developing countries, such as Bangladesh, the Islamic Republic of Iran and South Africa are also making substantive investments for disaster risk reduction, which have already helped reduce disaster casualties. Despite those positive developments, the allocation of resources for the implementation of the Strategy is slow and insufficient; many more countries need assistance and guidance to address this challenge.

27. Voluntary contributions[10] to the United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Reduction have improved steadily, as called for by General Assembly resolutions. However, the growing demands on the Strategy secretariat to ensure adequate support to the follow-up activities to the Hyogo Framework for Action, such as those reflected in the Strategy system joint work programme require substantial increases in the volume of funding and the timeliness, if the activities are to be successfully implemented. The expanding scope of work of the Strategy system work programme and the secretariat's workplan for the biennium 2008-2009, amount to $42 million in 2008 and $48.6 million in 2009. While 40 per cent of commitments are pledged for the secretariat biennial workplan by mid-2008, the financial commitments by donors to the system joint programmes have been very poor so far. Member States are encouraged to make multiannual, unearmarked contributions as early in the fiscal year as possible, and ideally in the first two quarters of the calendar year.

28. In its resolution 62/192, the General Assembly stressed the importance of disaster reduction. Noting the subsequent growing demands on the Strategy secretariat, the Assembly also pointed out the need to review the current methods of financing the secretariat, with a view to stabilizing its financial base, and requested the Secretary-General to submit a proposal for that purpose.

29. As noted in the present report and past reports, the relevance of reducing risks is increasingly evident, as is the role of the United Nations to support countries in

[10] In addition to the contributions from the World Bank and European Commission, the following Member States have provided contributions to the Trust Fund over the past year: Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

reducing the vulnerability of people. The challenges ahead are rapidly increasing. In order to leverage and multiply international cooperation efforts aimed at reducing vulnerability of communities and supporting the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, the Strategy secretariat performs management and key support functions in the areas of intergovernmental and inter-agency facilitation, resource mobilization and advocacy, knowledge management guidance and reporting. Some tangible results include the creation of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, the development of regional and national platforms, strategic partnerships with the World Bank and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, and joint work programming among key United Nations system agencies.

30. In spite of the clear need for, and centrality of the work of the United Nations in disaster risk reduction, those activities are not well reflected in the current programme of work of the Organization. Indeed, the Strategy secretariat is exclusively financed through voluntary extrabudgetary contributions through the United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Reduction. Contributions have increased over the years. However, in 2007, five donors provided over 80 per cent of all the contributions to the Trust Fund with a large degree of earmarking, providing little flexibility to the use of the funds. A sudden or unforeseeable drop of funding could cause a serious disruption in the secretariat activities in support of the whole community of Member States. Therefore, the Strategy secretariat has been actively seeking alternative methods of financing, including secondments from agencies and Member States. While those alternative means have strengthened the capacity of the secretariat to support specific initiatives, they have not ensured a minimum stability and predictability in the financing of key functions.

31. Overall, the current financing provisions for the Strategy secretariat do not assure an appropriate degree of financial stability and predictability, and thus put at jeopardy its key functions. While the Trust Fund should remain the main funding mechanism for the Strategy and partnership activities, it is essential to secure a stable and predictable flow of resources to support the basic performance of the secretariat's key functions. Therefore, Member States may wish to review whether the provisions of General Assembly resolution 54/219 should be revised to include assessed contributions.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

32. The impact of disasters on the loss of lives, property and livelihoods continues to escalate, owing to unsound development practices, rapid urbanization, degraded environmental assets and large numbers of vulnerable people, particularly the poor. In addition, climate change is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. While many countries have been able to reduce death tolls from disasters, much more needs to be done to invest in and systematically implement disaster risk reduction measures. Disasters caused by vulnerability to natural hazards are holding back progress towards halving poverty and the achievement of other Millennium Development Goals.

33. Following the first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Strategy system has been strengthened, in order to provide better support to national and local actors from regional offices and through thematic and inter-

agency partnerships. Several countries are setting up or strengthening their national platforms or other national mechanisms for disaster risk reduction. However, 147 countries have not yet established national platforms, and 66 countries lack official Hyogo Framework for Action focal points.

34. Good progress has been made in promoting, at the policy level, disaster risk reduction knowledge, experience and mechanisms as existing and proven measures for adapting to climate change, particularly through the Bali Action Plan. However, apart from a few examples, this has not yet translated into concrete and effective action at the country level.

35. Despite the increased commitment by Governments and other stakeholders, Governments are still not on track to achieve the goals set in the Hyogo Framework for Action. A lack of awareness, commitment and resources still remain the main obstacles. While there is a growing recognition of the benefits of investing for disaster risk reduction, financial resources available for disaster risk reduction are still insufficient at all levels. A major scaling-up of efforts and resources is needed.

36. While the voluntary contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Reduction have improved, as called for by General Assembly resolutions, the growing demands on the Strategy secretariat to ensure adequate support and follow-up to the Hyogo Framework for Action require substantial increases in the volume of funding and the timeliness of its receipt. In that context, the current financing provisions for the secretariat do not ensure the necessary degree of stability and predictability.

37. Moreover, if the Hyogo Framework for Action is to be effectively implemented, increased contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Reduction will be needed to fill, by 2009, the current gap of more than $70 million to support the work of various organizations involved in the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction system joint work programme.

38. On the basis of the preceding observations, the following recommendations are proposed.

(a) Accelerate the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, including through Strategy system mechanisms

39. **In order to achieve more effective implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, it is critical that Member States strengthen their cooperation through the existing Strategy system mechanisms, including national and regional platforms and the second session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, to be held in Geneva, from 15 to 19 June 2009. Building on the good experiences of existing national platforms, Member States are strongly urged to develop and strengthen such national coordination mechanisms for disaster risk reduction.**

(b) Ensure synergy between climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction

40. **Recognizing that disaster risk reduction plays a crucial role in safeguarding development gains from the threats posed by climate change, I encourage Member States to ensure coherence and synergy between climate change and disaster risk reduction agendas, through strong linkages between the Governmental entities responsible for climate change policy and for**

disaster risk reduction. This could include participation in multi-stakeholder platforms for disaster risk reduction by all concerned entities, including those responsible for climate change. Moreover, Member States are encouraged to conduct a baseline assessment of the status of disaster risk reduction and related adaptation efforts in their countries, and to prepare national adaptation plans drawing on the Hyogo Framework for Action.

(c) Invest in disaster risk reduction

41. **Member States are encouraged to ensure that practical measures are taken to reduce disaster risk, particularly of the poor and most vulnerable, with adequate resources. To that end, Member States should consider setting targets for public spending on multi-year disaster risk reduction programmes at the national and local levels. I encourage Governments, donors and funding institutions to increase their investment in disaster risk reduction substantially, as an integral component of all programmes for humanitarian action, economic and social development and environmental protection, including those addressing the Millennium Development Goals, and to improve coordination and tracking of those investments.**

(d) Strengthen the funding arrangements for the Strategy

42. **Considering the substantially increased responsibilities of the Strategy secretariat and the need for commensurately predictable and stable financial resources, I call on Member States and Strategy stakeholders to augment their financial contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Reduction to ensure adequate support for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, including for the Strategy system joint work programme.**

43. **In order to stabilize and make more predictable the financial base for the Strategy secretariat and its key functions, I draw the attention of Member States to the funding provisions of General Assembly resolution 54/219, which Member States may wish to review to include assessed contributions.**

Annex I

Additional information on progress made in implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action[a]

1. The following information is organized based on the five priorities for action set out in the Hyogo Framework for Action and by national, regional and international level of implementation.

A. Action at the national level

Priority 1
Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis

2. Cape Verde, Italy, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Sweden established platforms during the reporting period. Panama and Tajikistan consolidated their existing platforms, and the Swiss national platform celebrated its tenth anniversary. The Dominican Republic and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela took steps towards the establishment of national platforms. Maldives, Montenegro, Nepal and Thailand recently joined with designated focal points for the Hyogo Framework for Action.

3. National strategies or action plans for disaster risk reduction have been developed by the Governments of Afghanistan, Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, Tajikistan, Thailand and Vanuatu. Several countries in the Asia region, including Indonesia, adopted new bills institutionalizing disaster risk reduction as part of their policy frameworks. The Maldives Government is currently finalizing a National Disaster Management Act. Others, such as the Philippines and Timor-Leste, are in the process of doing so. Countries that have recently passed new acts on disaster risk reduction, such as India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, undertook activities to strengthen their national disaster management authorities.

4. The Philippines National Conference on Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction in Local Governance helped to improve coordination between the national and local level, and increase access to development funds for local level risk reduction. The Islamic Republic of Iran has balanced budgetary allocations for disasters, and is now allocating 25 per cent for prevention and preparedness, 20 per cent for response and 55 per cent for reconstruction. In India, over 150 civil society leaders launched the National Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction to serve as a platform for community-led disaster risk reduction initiatives. Senegal's national platform for disaster risk reduction launched a national disaster reduction network of parliamentarians in 2008.

5. A network of European platforms, which includes France, Germany and Switzerland, has actively contributed to the European Union green paper on climate change, to ensure linkages with disaster risk reduction. Horizontal collaboration has become instrumental for sharing information and experiences among national platforms. Germany, Italy, Norway and Switzerland have supported "twinning" of national platforms in Europe and developing countries by facilitating exchange and

[a] Complementing section III of the present report.

training between them. The national platforms of Madagascar and Senegal initiated South-South partnerships on disaster risk reduction.

6. UNDP supports national Governments in establishing and strengthening institutional and legislative arrangements for disaster reduction and recovery, and in mainstreaming disaster reduction in development processes through its Global Mainstreaming Initiative and national and regional capacity development programmes. UNDP has fielded National Disaster Reduction Advisers in 13 high-risk countries with a further 12 countries planned for 2009. They provide technical support in the development of national disaster risk reduction strategies and assist UNDP country offices, United Nations system agencies and, in some cases World Bank country offices, to help develop multi-year capacity development programmes.

7. The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery of the World Bank has expanded its technical assistance to 54 countries with activities promoting disaster-sensitive development planning and catastrophe risk insurance pooling; and helping countries to develop market-based crop insurance strategies and assess economic and financial impacts owing to natural hazards, prepare risk atlases, and deliver risk reduction strategies, including climate modelling and risk management. Recognizing the vital role of South-South partnerships in achieving poverty reduction objectives and attaining the Millennium Development Goals, a South-South cooperation programme was launched in May 2008.

Priority 2
Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning

8. Risk assessments are essential as starting points for reducing disaster risk, as has been proven by many community-based, local, national and regional efforts. Under the auspices of the Global Risk Identification Programme, the establishment of disaster loss observatories has been initiated in a number of countries.[b] The Programme is also working in several countries[c] to build local capacities for disaster risk analysis.

9. A Central American Probabilistic Risk Assessment,[d] a risk modelling platform and risk atlas, helps national authorities to make better founded investment decisions. Nicaragua is the first country to use the model.

10. Many gaps and obstacles still remain regarding the development of people-centred early warning systems. In the Indian Ocean region, the Governments of Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka organized national consultation meetings to identify national priorities for enhanced tsunami early warning systems.

Priority 3
Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels

11. The impact of disasters can be mitigated if people are well informed about feasible measures to reduce vulnerability. Numerous conferences and training workshops were conducted and training materials published for different audiences,

[b] Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Panama, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

[c] Chile, Maldives, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru and Sri Lanka.

[d] With support from the World Bank and the Strategy secretariat.

by a wide range of actors. Several countries included disaster risk reduction components in school programmes and media, including television, radio and Internet.

12. Nigeria embarked on a project to mainstream disaster risk reduction into school activities. In Nepal, students were trained to become "risk reduction ambassadors". In India, a programme helped some 100,000 students and 2,500 teachers to develop school disaster management plans. In Bangladesh, innovative e-learning tools on climate and flood risk management were developed for classroom training and self-learning. Tajikistan integrated disaster risk reduction into primary and secondary school curricula. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan introduced the topic into the formal curricula of leading technical universities.

13. The Islamic Republic of Iran allocated $4 billion for the strengthening of 250,000 school classes within five years, and the same amount for the construction of new safe school buildings. These achievements are the culmination of efforts made by the Iranian Ministry of Education and the Islamic Republic of Iran-based International Institute of Earthquake Engineering and Seismology. Workshops on seismic safety were conducted in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for secondary school headmasters.

14. In Central America, national knowledge fairs took place in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama to raise public awareness of existing tools and lessons learned in disaster risk reduction. Countries around the world celebrated the International Day for Disaster Reduction on 10 October by organizing advocacy activities at national and local levels.

Priority 4
Reduce the underlying risk factors

15. Limited progress has been made in reducing underlying risk factors related to changing social, economic, and environmental conditions, as well as to climate change.

16. Improved building safety standards have been promoted in Central Asia. A group of experts in seismology and earthquake engineering developed a guidebook on safer building practices in rural areas, based on low-cost traditional knowledge, disseminated in local languages in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, while booklets on "Earthquakes and safer building strategies" and "Floods, mudflows, landslides and safer construction" were published and disseminated through universities.

17. National authorities and international development partners in Malawi and Mozambique launched programmes to mainstream disaster risk reduction in national development plans.

18. To mainstream disaster risk reduction in climate and hazard sensitive economic sectors, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) committed to support line departments, extension services, municipalities and farmers organizations to identify and implement enhanced and better coordinated disaster risk reduction practices for the agriculture and food sectors.

Priority 5

Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

19. Many countries, among them Colombia, Honduras, India, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Uruguay, have strengthened their capacities in preparedness, including developing contingency plans, community preparedness and drills. With support from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Comoros, Madagascar, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the United Republic of Tanzania have strengthened their national tsunami early warning and information sharing with local communities. In Thailand, UNDP supported several training events to strengthen the National Disaster Warning Centre's ability to deal with media and to enhance the accuracy and credibility of warnings and other public awareness messages. The Centre organized a national tsunami drill entitled "the Andaman Wave 2007".

20. In Pakistan, the National Disaster Management Authority[e] is preparing disaster risk and recovery baseline studies in disaster-prone districts and standard operating procedures for post-disaster livelihood assessment at the district level to help to guide response in the immediate aftermath of future disasters triggered by natural hazards.

B. Action at the regional level

21. **Africa:** The African Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, called for by the African Heads of States at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa in 2004, forms the basis for the commitment of African States. The African Union assisted the Economic Community of West African States and the Southern African Development Community with support from the World Bank and the Strategy to develop more proactive approaches to disaster reduction.

22. A sub-Saharan Africa workshop held in Dakar brought national platforms and ministries of finance together to assess their role in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into national poverty reduction plans, and to learn of post-disaster assessment methodology.[f] Ghana, Madagascar, Nigeria and Senegal have included disaster risk reduction approaches in their poverty reduction strategies.

23. **West Asia and North Africa:** The Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport of the League of Arab States hosts and contributes to the Strategy secretariat's new regional office in Cairo and promotes risk reduction in the region. The Strategy partners have organized several regional workshops in Cairo to agree on actions and collaboration on risk assessments, information sharing, community-based risk reduction and climate change adaptation. The Strategy key documentation and standards were translated into Arabic and Russian.

24. The League of Arab States discussed a working agreement with the Strategy to include disaster risk reduction as part of their political and technical meetings. The Organization of the Islamic Conference agreed in their biannual General Meeting on Cooperation to work with the Strategy on awareness-raising of the Hyogo

[e] Supported by the United Nations system (FAO, the International Labour Organization and others).

[f] Organized by the African Union, the United Nations/International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the World Bank with collaboration from Senegal and UNDP.

Framework for Action at the highest levels; and to contribute to capacity-building among its member States nationally, regionally and globally.

25. Countries in Central Asia agreed in November 2007 to work towards strengthened regional collaboration in preparedness for disasters, through the creation of a regional centre for preparedness.

26. A regional centre opened in September 2007 in Mashhad, Islamic Republic of Iran, as a specialized agency of the Economic Cooperation Organization, with the objective to promote cooperation between member States for effective risk management, especially in the fields of meteorology, climatology and hydrology.

27. **Asia and the Pacific:** In the region, the Strategy secretariat facilitated a series of consultations to help to identify challenges and explore possibilities for strengthening existing regional supporting mechanisms and coordination. This culminated in the establishment of the Asia Regional Platform, which was formally adopted at the second Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Delhi, held in November 2007, along with the Delhi Declaration on Disaster Risk Reduction. This committed Governments to accelerate implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, including action plans and mechanisms for periodic review, monitoring, reporting and linkages to the Millennium Development Goals.

28. Member countries of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific reiterated their commitment to disaster risk reduction, through a resolution adopted in May 2008 on "Regional cooperation in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters in Asia and the Pacific".[g]

29. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in collaboration with the Strategy secretariat, supported an initiative to integrate risk reduction into school curricula and promote guidelines for school safety. The Strategy secretariat co-organized with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNESCO in Bangkok a regional workshop on school education and disaster risk reduction, to stimulate dialogue on education for disaster preparedness between practitioners, curriculum developers and policymakers from countries throughout the region and adopted a Bangkok Action Agenda. Following the workshop, eight national institutes from China, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vanuatu agreed to conduct a situational analysis of policies, programmes, curricula and school-based activities and materials in relation to the integration of risk reduction into school curricula and teachers' training.

30. **The Americas:** The Rio Group emphasized at its twentieth Group Summit of Heads of States the need to support initiatives of the Strategy system in the region and called upon nations for more active participation in advancing their national platforms, exchange of good practices and policies that support disaster risk reduction.

31. The High-Level Conference on Risk Reduction, Mitigation and Recovery from Natural Disasters in the Greater Caribbean, held in Haiti in November 2007, resulted in increased political commitment and adoption of a Regional Disaster Risk

[g] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2008, Supplement No. 19* (E/2008/39), chap. IV, resolution 64/2.

Reduction Action Plan. It evaluated regional progress in implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action, promoting national platforms, mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction, gender and adaptation to climate change, and policy frameworks with special focus on collaboration among the small island developing States.

32. In May 2008, Central American and Dominican Republic ministries of education and other national authorities approved the Regional Strategic Framework for Education on Disaster Risk Reduction to regulate the education sector throughout Central America and the Dominican Republic.

33. Preparations for the mid-2009 regional platform on disaster risk reduction have begun, with the Organization of the American States playing a major role, in collaboration with subregional entities, such as the Central American Coordination Centre for Natural Disaster Prevention, the Andean Committee for Disaster Prevention and Response, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency and the Association of Caribbean States.

34. **Europe:** The Council of Europe, through its European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement, is facilitating the development of a regional platform on disaster risk reduction and cooperation in the field of major disasters triggered by natural or technological hazards between Eastern Europe, the South of the Mediterranean and Western Europe, focusing on sharing good practices, supporting country assessments and implementing activities to reduce vulnerability. With the Strategy secretariat, it will support national platforms in monitoring and reporting on progress made in implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action. In April 2008, a second meeting of European national platforms and focal points agreed on further collaboration and support towards the development of national platforms and progress reporting in the region.

35. The Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern-Europe committed with a strong training component to the Hyogo Framework for Action on risk assessment, early warning and disaster mitigation. The Strategy secretariat and the World Bank, involving many partners from the United Nations, the European Commission, bilateral agencies and Governments in the region, developed the South-Eastern Europe Disaster Risk Mitigation and Adaptation Programme to reduce the vulnerability to hydro-meteorological and other hazards in the region.

36. In addition, within the European Union and the European Commission, a series of initiatives towards coherence and new policies on disaster risk reduction were initiated in response to the Hyogo Framework for Action. The European Commission adopted a communication on "Western Balkans: enhancing the European perspective", which will improve regional coordination mechanisms related to hydro-meteorological hazards.

37. In the area of education and school safety, the Council of Europe, in cooperation with the Government of Cyprus, organized a European and Mediterranean workshop on school disaster risk reduction in preparation for the forty-eighth session of the UNESCO/International Bureau of Education International Conference on Education, to be held in Geneva from 25 to 28 November 2008.

C. Action at the international level

Priority 1
Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis

38. A joint United Nations Development Group/International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Task Team on mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into United Nations programming processes at the country level was established. The overall goal is to increase and improve the country-level support to Member States to implement disaster risk reduction strategies and the Hyogo Framework for Action. The task team is currently finalizing guidelines on integrating disaster risk reduction into the common country assessment and United Nations Development Assistance Framework processes. It will also compile a set of methods, tools and resource bases for United Nations country teams to support implementation of strategies and policies at the national level.

39. UNDP supports a number of thematic platforms of the strategy, such as risk identification through the Global Risk Identification Programme, capacity development through the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative and post-disaster recovery through the International Recovery Platform. This recovery platform is chaired by the International Labour Organization and the secretariat is hosted in Kobe, Japan, by the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre, the Hyogo Prefecture and the Strategy secretariat.

40. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies launched a Global Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction in October 2007 to increase the International Federation's effort in reducing disaster risks among the most vulnerable communities where National Red Cross and Red Crescent operate.

41. The Strategy secretariat has increased promotion of gender mainstreaming. The focus is threefold: advocating the importance and necessity of gender-equality in achieving the overarching goal of the Hyogo Framework for Action; educating and mobilizing both men and women to promote gender equality in disaster risk reduction; and providing guidance and good practice for gender-sensitive policy and programme related to disaster risk reduction. The Strategy secretariat organized a multi-stakeholder expert meeting to advance policy guidance and development of training modules for capacity-building on gender and disaster risk reduction.

Priority 2
Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning

42. In response to the conclusions and recommendations of the Global Survey of Early Warning Systems (see A/62/340), WMO and several Strategy system partners, in collaboration with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning, have established a partnership to strengthen international cooperation in early warning systems, including joint initiatives, and to stimulate more systematic approaches to early warning systems. The WMO country-level assessment survey, covering 140 countries, indicated that 90 per cent of participating countries require guidance and standard methodologies for monitoring, and mapping of hydro-meteorological and climate-related hazards for the development of early warning systems from national to local levels. In response to that need, WMO has initiated projects for the development of hazard monitoring and mapping guidelines, as well as early warning system capacities for specific hazards

such as flash floods, sand and dust storms, storm surges and droughts, built upon regional cooperation. WMO, in collaboration with the World Bank, IFRC and a number of regional agencies is improving national and local early warning systems with national meteorological and hydrological services and civil protection and disaster risk management agencies.

43. The new United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs aims to support universal access to satellite technology used in early warning systems and other space-based information relevant to disaster risk reduction. During the launching workshop, experts discussed how to define user requirements, horizontal coordination, the framework of a knowledge portal, and a capacity-building framework.

44. The Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System was consolidated and regional arrangements for coverage are in progress after completion of the initial system in July 2006. The focus is on improved data-sharing policies to ensure that real-time information is communicated by national authorities to communities. At its fifth session, in April 2008, the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System welcomed offers by Australia, India and Indonesia to act as Regional Tsunami Watch Providers, replacing by 2011 the interim service provided by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre in Hawaii and the Japan Meteorological Agency. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, which coordinates tsunami warning system activities, including risk assessment, warning system training, emergency response and preparedness, established intergovernmental coordination groups for the North-East Atlantic and Mediterranean, and Caribbean regions and facilitated tsunami warning interests as an active partner in the Integrated Global Observing Strategy. In partnership with UNESCO and other partners of the Indian Ocean Consortium, the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning supported 11 Indian Ocean countries to overcome gaps in national capacity for tsunami early warning systems. WMO completed the upgrade of the Global Telecommunication System in January 2008 in the countries bordering the Indian Ocean and adjacent seas. All countries can receive tsunami watch information and advisories within two minutes from the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre in Hawaii and the Japan Meteorological Agency, providing interim tsunami watch and advisory services.

45. UNESCO continued to strengthen international and regional networks on knowledge sharing and capacity-building for earthquake risk mitigation. In cooperation with Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, an international platform on earthquakes and tsunamis was developed, including a research and training platform for earthquake disaster reduction. Earthquake risk reduction networks have been implemented in the Mediterranean and Asian regions. Similarly, the International Consortium on Landslides paved the way for the organization of a World Landslide Forum, to be held in Tokyo from 18 to 21 November 2008, under the aegis of the Strategy.

Priority 3
Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels

46. The Strategy secretariat worked with many partners on several databases on disaster risk reduction expertise, research resources and technologies (www.preventionweb.net) and published and disseminated information on disaster risk reduction good practices on gender, climate change and poverty reduction (available from www.unisdr.org).

47. The UNESCO-led International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Platform on Knowledge and Education supported the World Disaster Reduction Campaign "Disaster risk reduction begins at school" (2006-2007), which created a global momentum for strengthening disaster risk education and ensuring school safety. Many stakeholders throughout the world adopted the Campaign, representing the beginning of a systematic effort to achieve school safety and a "risk-aware" education. The Platform compiled a catalogue of educational materials to be shared over the Internet. The Council of Europe prepared a library of web-links in four languages. Many country-specific projects were initiated with ministries of education led by UNICEF and ActionAid, among others.

48. The ongoing 2008-2009 World Disaster Reduction campaign "Hospitals safe from disasters", supported by the World Health Organization and the World Bank, aims at better protecting the lives of patients, health staff and the public by reinforcing the structural resilience of health facilities; ensuring that health facilities continue to function in the aftermath of disasters; and better preparing and training health workers on preparedness plans that will keep health systems operational if natural hazards strike.

49. The United Nations Disaster Management Training Programme was redesigned into a Capacity Development for Disaster Reduction Initiative through a joint effort between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNDP and the Strategy secretariat. The initiative supported training in Algeria, Mozambique and Uganda and at regional level in South-Eastern Europe, and has initiated training for United Nations resident/humanitarian coordinators and other senior United Nations officials.

50. In partnership with the Strategy and international recovery platform, the ILO International Training Centre has developed a local level sustainable development training and course programme for disaster risk reduction and recovery planning, currently active in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Priority 4
Reduce the underlying risk factors

51. The Strategy secretariat is working with UNEP, the World Conservation Union and regional partners to strengthen national capacities to apply environmental tools and services for risk reduction. It builds on the issue paper, "Environment and vulnerability: emerging perspectives", developed in consultation with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Working Group on Environment and Disaster, leveraging environmental policies and practices for disaster risk reduction.

52. WMO, in close collaboration with the World Bank, the World Food Programme and the reinsurance sector, is facilitating meteorological, hydrological and climate information to support the development of financial risk transfer markets, identifying needs of those markets, and developing mechanisms to facilitate that information through the national meteorological and hydrological services.

53. The High-Level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy, held at FAO in Rome from 3 to 5 June 2008, stressed the complexity of risks associated with the interactions between climate change, food security and ecological balance.

Priority 5
Strengthen the disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

54. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee convened a session on humanitarian action and challenges, including climate change, both at its working level and at its Principals' meeting in 2008, in which the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action was stressed as a means to adapt to climate change. The Standing Committee endorsed the revised Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance aiming at United Nations country teams.

55. Development of the "Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response Guidance and Indicator Package for Implementing Priority Five of the Hyogo Framework"[h] was coordinated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to help Governments and local authorities to strengthen disaster preparedness. The roll-out of the package was initiated in Uganda, Peru and Nicaragua. By request of the Governments of Angola and Zambia, the Office and UNDP organized disaster management workshops to strengthen the capacities at the national and district level.

56. To improve understanding of the impact of disasters on livelihoods, FAO and ILO developed a Livelihood Assessment Toolkit, tested in several countries including Bolivia, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines and the Solomon Islands. FAO developed a Rapid Agricultural Disaster Assessment Routine methodology, composed of an assessment model, database of historical disasters and agricultural system and the Geographic Information Systems to assess geographical distribution of the intensity of a disaster and affected agricultural production and values immediately after a disaster.

[h] Published by the Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (Geneva, 2008).

Annex II

International cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon

1. In response to General Assembly resolution 52/200 on international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon, the 1998 Declaration of Guayaquil called for "immediate action to assess the feasibility of establishing an international centre for the research of the El Niño/Southern Oscillation (ENSO)". the General Assembly also adopted the related resolutions 53/185, 54/220, 55/197, 56/194, 59/232 and 61/199.

2. Over the last five years, the Guayaquil-based centre, the International Research Centre on the El Niño Phenomenon, has consolidated its role in Western South America region particularly in identifying and monitoring the El Niño phenomenon, providing information products and tools, and establishing networks for broad dissemination, with over 16,000 contacts.

3. The Centre collects climate and oceanographic information from several international centres, as well as from national meteorological and hydrological services to monitor the climate and related hazards. That information is used to provide regional seasonal forecasting and a biweekly web-based bulletin. It is also used to create agriculture risk maps, sea surface analysis and forecasts, and a digital health climate information resource.

4. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) continues to facilitate development of an ENSO consensus report on engaging all the major climate centres around the world and facilitates regional climate outlook forums in different regions that analyse expected impacts on ENSO and other climatic regimes to various stakeholders. With assistance from the World Bank, WMO is initiating these forums in South-Eastern Europe and held the first workshop of its kind in 2008.

5. In South America, the International Research Centre on the El Niño Phenomenon (www.ciifen-int.org) has made it possible to follow up on the climate evolution and the El Niño and La Niña events in late 2007, providing accurate information about the medium-term forecast and expected impact to all stakeholders. However, the climate variability associated with ENSO, as well as seasonal variability and the impact of climate change, are still not properly addressed either in Western South America or elsewhere. A multimodal and multilevel Climate Information System for Agricultural Risk Management in the Andean Countries is being developed to address that shortcoming, with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank, and will be operational by the end of 2008. Its objective is to create a regional system for decision makers, planning institutions and end-users.

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Items 7 and 124 of the provisional agenda*

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items: reports of the General Committee

Pattern of conferences

Letter dated 8 September 2008 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to the President of the General Assembly

I am writing to you in relation to the provisions of paragraph 7 of section I of General Assembly resolution 40/243, according to which no subsidiary organ of the Assembly may meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly. Subsidiary organs wishing to meet during a regular session of the Assembly must submit their requests through the Committee on Conferences.

I wish to inform you that the Committee on Conferences has received requests from the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the Disarmament Commission, the Independent Audit Advisory Committee, the Executive Board of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to meet in New York during the main part of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly.

The Committee on Conferences, having carefully considered those requests and the reasons for them, does not object, on the strict understanding that such meetings would have to be accommodated within available facilities and services, so that the activities of the General Assembly itself are not adversely affected. The chairpersons of those bodies will also be informed of the statistics relating to their utilization of conference services in the past. If the benchmark figure of 80 per cent was not reached in the previous year, the Committee will express its concern and make proposals for improvement.

* A/63/150 and Corr.1.

08-50466 (E) 120908

Accordingly, I should be grateful if the General Assembly would explicitly authorize the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, the Disarmament Commission, the Independent Audit Advisory Committee, the Executive Board of INSTRAW and the Executive Board of UNICEF to meet in accordance with their requests, subject to the conditions referred to in the foregoing paragraph.

(*Signed*) Patrick A. **Chuasoto**
Chairman
Committee on Conferences

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General Assembly

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Sixty-third session
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Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items: reports of the General Committee

Pattern of conferences

Letter dated 15 September 2008 from the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to the President of the General Assembly

I am writing in connection with the provisions of section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243, according to which no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly may meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly. Those subsidiary organs that wish to meet during a regular session of the Assembly must submit their requests through the Committee on Conferences.

I wish to inform you that the Committee on Conferences has received an additional request from the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund (UNDP and UNFPA) to hold one meeting in New York during the main part of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly.

The Committee on Conferences, having carefully considered that request and the reasons for it, does not object, on the strict understanding that the meeting would have to be accommodated when facilities and services can be made available without adversely affecting the activities of the General Assembly and its Main Committees.

Accordingly, I should be grateful if the General Assembly would explicitly authorize the Executive Board of UNDP and UNFPA to meet in accordance with its request, subject to the conditions referred to above.

(*Signed*) Patrick A. **Chuasoto**
Chairman
Committee on Conferences

* A/63/150 and Corr.1.

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Sixty-third session
Item 53 of the provisional agenda*
Implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and strengthening of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

Coordinated implementation of the Habitat Agenda

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General hereby transmits the report on the coordinated implementation of the Habitat Agenda (E/2008/64)** to the General Assembly for consideration at its sixty-third session under item 53 of the provisional agenda pursuant to Economic and Social Council decision 2008/239.

* A/63/150 and Corr.1.

** Document E/2008/64 has been circulated separately.

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Items 121 and 126 of the provisional agenda*

Programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009

Human resources management

Conditions of service and compensation for officials, other than Secretariat officials, serving the General Assembly: full-time members of the International Civil Service Commission and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in paragraph 2 of its resolution 35/221, decided that the compensation and other conditions of service of the full-time members of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) and of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions would be reviewed normally every five years. The last such review was done in 2000 during the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. By its resolution 55/238, the Assembly took note of the relevant report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/55/29). In paragraph 21 of that report, it was stated that, in accordance with the decision taken by the Assembly in paragraph 2 of its resolution 35/221 in respect of the periodic review of the compensation and other conditions of service of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of ICSC, the next review would be undertaken at the sixtieth session of the Assembly in 2005.

2. The General Assembly, in its resolution 57/285, decided to implement, with effect from 1 January 2003, a revised salary scale for staff in the Professional and higher categories. The increase was 6.3 per cent for the D-2 grade and above. In the light of that decision, the Secretary-General, in paragraph 4 of his report (A/C.5/57/35), proposed to apply a 6.3 per cent increase to the net compensation of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory

* A/63/150 and Corr.1.

08-50649 (E) 061008

Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, effective 1 January 2003. The Assembly, in paragraph 1 of its resolution 58/266, approved the suggestion outlined in paragraph 4 of the report, with effect from 1 September 2003. The General Assembly, in paragraphs 4 and 5 of its resolution 58/266, also requested the Secretary-General to bring the issue of conditions of service and compensation of the three officials to the attention of the Assembly when the annual compensation for the Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee falls below the level of the compensation of Assistant Secretaries-General, but no sooner than at its sixty-third session, and also decided that the procedure outlined above would replace the requirement for future five-year comprehensive reviews outlined in paragraph 8 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/57/35). The present report is being submitted in compliance with the foregoing request.

3. In order to facilitate consideration of the various issues regarding the compensation and conditions of service of the three officials concerned, the present report is divided into five sections: compensation, other conditions of service, post-retirement benefits, financial implications and the next comprehensive review.

II. Compensation

4. On the occasion of the 2000 review, the General Assembly, in section VII, paragraph 3, of its resolution 55/238, reaffirmed the principle that the conditions of service of the three officials should be separate and distinct from those of the Secretariat.

5. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 35/221, the annual net compensation of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions was adjusted in January of each year by 90 per cent of the movement in the consumer price index (CPI) for New York (rounded to the nearest whole number), provided that the index has increased by at least 5 per cent. Following the comprehensive review in 2000 of the salary of these senior officials, which is detailed in the report of the Secretary-General (see A/C.5/55/29), the Assembly, in its resolution 55/238, removed the requirement for at least a 5 per cent movement in the index. As the movement of the index is measured over the period from November to November, the compensation for these three senior officials is revised each January.

6. It was noted during the 2000 review that in 1996 the compensation of these three senior officials was equivalent to 97 per cent of the compensation of the most senior officials. However, by 1 January 2000, that percentage had decreased to 90.4 per cent. In order to restore the relationship that had existed previously, it was proposed — and the General Assembly agreed, by its resolution 55/238 — that, in addition to the granting of the CPI adjustment of 7 per cent to the salaries of the three officials, the salaries would also be increased by an additional 3.1 per cent and the special allowance of the two Chairmen would rise from $8,000 to $10,000. The relationship between the compensation of the three officials concerned and that of the most senior Secretariat officials was thus restored to 97 per cent.

7. As mentioned in paragraph 2 above, the General Assembly, in its resolution 57/285, decided to implement, with effect from 1 January 2003, a revised salary scale for staff in the Professional and higher categories. The increase was 6.3 per

cent for the D-2 grade and above. The Secretary-General, in paragraph 4 of his report (A/C.5/57/35), proposed to apply a 6.3 per cent increase to the net compensation of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, effective 1 January 2003.

8. As a result of the action taken by the General Assembly in its resolution 58/266, effective 1 September 2003 the annual compensation of the two full-time members of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee was revised from $157,266 to $167,174, with an additional special allowance of $10,000 for the Chairman of the Commission and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee. The increase in the annual compensation of the officials concerned took into account the increase of 6.3 per cent granted to certain grades of the Professional and higher categories salary scales, effective 1 January 2003.

9. By its resolution 58/266, the General Assembly also decided to maintain the established updating procedure that it approved in paragraph 3 of its resolution 35/221, as amended by its resolution 55/238. Accordingly, the annual net compensation of the two full-time members of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has continued to be adjusted every January on the basis of 90 per cent of the CPI movement for New York measured over the period from November to November. Consequently, adjustments in the annual compensation of the individuals concerned have taken place every January.

10. The movement in the consumer price index for New York over the period from November 2002 to November 2003 was 3.1 per cent. Ninety per cent of that movement represented 2.79 per cent, which, when rounded to the nearest whole number, resulted in an additional increase of 3 per cent in the annual compensation for the three officials concerned beginning 1 January 2004. Accordingly, the annual net compensation of the two full-time members of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions was revised from $167,174 to $172,189, effective 1 January 2004. The movement in the CPI for New York over the period from November 2003 to November 2004 was 3.91 per cent. Ninety per cent of that movement represented 3.52 per cent, which, when rounded to the nearest whole number, resulted in an additional increase of 4 per cent in the annual compensation for the three officials concerned beginning 1 January 2005. Accordingly, the annual net compensation of the two full-time members of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee was revised from $172,189 to $179,077, effective 1 January 2005. The movement in the CPI for New York over the period from November 2004 to November 2005 was 3.909 per cent. Ninety per cent of that movement represented 3.52 per cent, which, when rounded to the nearest whole number, resulted in an increase of 4 per cent in the annual compensation for the three officials concerned beginning 1 January 2006. Accordingly, the annual net compensation of the two full-time members of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee was revised from $179,077 to $186,240, effective 1 January 2006. The movement in the CPI for New York over the period from November 2005 to November 2006 was 2.601 per cent. Ninety per cent of that movement represented 2.341 per cent, which, when rounded to the nearest whole number, resulted in an increase of 2 per cent in the annual compensation for the three officials concerned beginning 1 January 2007. Accordingly, the annual net compensation of the two full-time members of ICSC

and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee was revised from $186,240 to $189,965, effective 1 January 2007. The movement in the CPI for New York over the period from November 2006 to November 2007 was 3.894 per cent. Ninety per cent of that movement represented 3.5046 per cent, which, when rounded to the nearest whole number, resulted in an increase of 4 per cent in the annual compensation for the three officials concerned beginning 1 January 2008. Accordingly, the annual net compensation of the two full-time members of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee was revised from $189,965 to $197,564, effective 1 January 2008. The additional special allowance of $10,000 for the Chairman of the Commission and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee is not subject to the application of the movement of the CPI and remained unchanged.

11. Between November 2007 and July 2008, the CPI for New York rose by 4.69 per cent. By November 2008, it is projected to be at a level approximately 4.7 per cent higher than that of November 2007. Consequently, based on the adjustment procedure in effect, it is anticipated that the annual net compensation of the three officials will be increased by 4 per cent beginning on 1 January 2009.

(United States dollars)

	Current salary 1 January 2008	*Proposed increase 1 January 2009*
Chairman of ICSC and Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions		
Net salary	197 564	205 467
Special allowance	10 000	10 000
Vice-Chairman of ICSC		
Net salary	197 564	205 467

12. With regard to the level of compensation of the three officials, it should be recalled that the Secretary-General, in his report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session (A/C.5/55/29), reiterated what he had noted previously in his report to the Assembly at its thirty-eighth session, as follows:

> "After careful review of the developments over the years, it seems obvious that the basic principles enunciated in the past should continue to apply, namely, that the compensation and other conditions of service of the full-time officials other than staff members should continue to be set by the General Assembly and that there should be no direct or automatic link to the salary system applicable to staff of the United Nations common system. At the same time, it is useful to recall the views expressed by the Secretary-General in the comprehensive study undertaken in 1976 on the criteria to be applied to determine the emoluments of the members of the International Court of Justice, namely, that 'the United Nations system forms, in a sense, a structure within which the interrelationship between the top posts has probably more importance than comparison with positions outside the United Nations'. It is for this reason that the long-standing practice has been to take into account the level of remuneration of senior Secretariat officials in determining the appropriate remuneration for members of organs or subsidiary organs of the

United Nations appointed by the United Nations to serve in their individual capacity on a full-time basis" (A/C.5/38/27, para. 41).

13. Accordingly, on the basis of previous practice, the relevant information on the remuneration levels of senior Secretariat officials concerned for the period 2004-2008 is provided in the annex to the present report.

14. The data contained in the annex shows that, over the period from January 2004 to January 2008, the total annual net compensation of the Chairman of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has remained above the level of the compensation of Assistant Secretaries-General serving in New York. As of January 2008, their annual net compensation was equivalent to 101 per cent of that of Assistant Secretaries-General paid at the dependant rate. As indicated in paragraph 11 above, it is expected that the movement in the consumer price index for New York over the period from November 2007 to November 2008 will be 4.7 per cent. Consequently, on the basis of the adjustment procedure in effect, it is anticipated that the annual net compensation of the three officials will be increased by some 4 per cent beginning on 1 January 2009. The Secretary-General notes that on the basis of the data contained in the annex, it is possible that the total annual net compensation of the Chairman of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee might drop slightly below the level of the compensation of Assistant Secretaries-General (by some 1.5 per cent).

15. With regard to the special allowance payable to the Chairman of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee in recognition of their added responsibilities, it may be recalled that the amount of the allowance was last revised in 2000 and established at $10,000 per annum, with effect from 1 January 2001, by the General Assembly in its resolution 55/238. No change is proposed with regard to the level of the special allowance of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee and the Chairman of ICSC at this time.

III. Other conditions of service

16. The other conditions of service of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of ICSC and of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for the period 1948-1990 were set out in paragraphs 16 to 28 of the 1990 report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/45/21). By its resolution 45/249, the General Assembly approved new provisions for the payment of installation grants to those officials[1] and compensation to survivors in the event of death during service.[2] By the same resolution, the Assembly approved the proposal that the amount of reimbursement for education costs be increased in line with its resolution 43/226 and subject to the same ceiling, together with the application of provisions concerning disabled children. Provision also continued to be made for one related trip per year from the place of scholastic attendance when outside the country of the

[1] The grant was not payable to the incumbents at that time and is applicable to their successors only if they were not residing at the duty station at the time of their appointment (A/C.5/45/21, paras. 42-43 and 45, and A/45/7/Add.13, para. 3).

[2] Comprising a lump sum equivalent to one month of the annual compensation of the official per year of service, subject to a minimum of three months and a maximum of nine months (A/C.5/45/21, paras. 44 and 45, and A/45/7/Add.13, para. 3).

duty station. In addition, increases in the level of the education grant or changes in the provisions regarding disabled children decided by the Assembly were extended to the three officials (A/C.5/45/21, paras. 46-48, and A/45/7/Add.13, para. 4). The Assembly decided that the other conditions of service for those officials, with the exception of the level of pensionable remuneration (see sect. IV below), should remain unchanged.

17. The Commission also reviewed the education grant in 2008, and its recommendations concerning the maximum reimbursement levels in various currency areas for the education grant are before the General Assembly at its current session (A/63/30, chap. III, part C, paras. 48-62).

18. No change is proposed with regard to the manner of application of these other conditions of service of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of ICSC at this time.

IV. Post-retirement benefits

19. In its resolution 46/192 of 20 December 1991, the General Assembly decided that officials appointed or elected to ungraded positions who become participants in the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund should have their pensionable remuneration adjusted, between comprehensive reviews, in accordance with the procedure applicable for adjustment of the scale of pensionable remuneration of staff in the Professional and higher categories, as set out in article 54 (b) of the Regulations of the Fund. Accordingly, the pensionable remuneration of the three officials concerned is adjusted at the same time and by the same percentage as that used to adjust their annual compensation. This methodology has been applied since that time. As at 1 January 2008, the pensionable remuneration of the Chairman of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions is currently $256,832 per annum and that of the Vice-Chairman of ICSC $243,072 per annum. Their pensionable remuneration should also be adjusted as at 1 January 2009. Based on the estimated movement of 4 per cent in the CPI for New York, effective 1 January 2009 the pensionable remuneration of the Chairman of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee should be revised to $267,105 and that of the Vice-Chairman of ICSC to $252,795.

V. Financial implications

20. On the basis of the information outlined above, it is estimated that there will be additional requirements of $33,194 for the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 comprising $18,686 under section 1, "Overall policy-making, direction and coordination", and $14,508 under section 30, "Jointly financed administrative activities". This would represent the full cost of provisions in respect of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee and the net cost to the United Nations of the provisions for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of ICSC, which are financed jointly with the other organizations of the United Nations system. These requirements would be reported in the context of the second performance report on the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009, to be presented to the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session.

21. The General Assembly may wish to take note of the present report.

VI. Next comprehensive review

22. In accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly in its resolution 58/266 in respect of the review of the compensation and other conditions of service of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the next comprehensive review should be undertaken when the level of the annual compensation of the Chairman of ICSC and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee falls below the level of the compensation of Assistant Secretaries-General.

Annex

Evolution of the annual net compensation of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission, compared with that of senior officials of the Secretariat at Headquarters

Year	*Chairman of ACABQ and of ICSC*[a]	*Vice-Chairman of ICSC*	*Assistant Secretary-General with dependant*[b]	*Assistant Secretary-General without dependant*[b]	*Under-Secretary-General with dependant*[c]	*Under-Secretary-General without dependant*[c]
Jan. 2004	182 189	172 189	180 304	163 555	197 312	177 970
Jan. 2005	189 077	179 077	188 097	170 611	205 809	185 617
Jan. 2006	196 040	186 240	194 670	176 563	212 975	192 066
Jan. 2007	199 965	189 965	199 256	180 716	217 975	196 566
Jan. 2008	207 564	197 564	205 501	186 371	224 783	202 693
Jan. 2009 (projected)	215 467[d]	205 467[d]	218,767[e]	198 384[e]	239 247[e]	215 711[e]
Percentage increase 2004-2009	18.3	19.3	21.3	21.3	21.3	21.2

[a] Including a special allowance of $10,000 per annum.

[b] Including a representation allowance of $3,000 per annum.

[c] Including a representation allowance of $4,000 per annum.

[d] Assumes a 4 per cent adjustment to annual net compensation based on the movement of the consumer price index for New York.

[e] Reflecting a 6.55 per cent adjustment in the post adjustment multiplier for New York, effective 1 August 2008.

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Sixty-third session
Item 117 of the provisional agenda*
Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations

Letter dated 4 September 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the text of the Declaration and the Colombo Statement on Food Security adopted by the Heads of State or Government of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) at the 15th SAARC Summit, held in Colombo on 2 and 3 August 2008 (see annex).

I request that the letter and its annex be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 117 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) H.M. G. S. **Palihakkara**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka

* A/63/150 and Corr.1.

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Annex to the letter dated 4 September 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Fifteenth SAARC Summit
Colombo, 2-3 August 2008
Declaration: Partnership for Growth for Our People

Introduction

1. The President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency Mr. Hamid Karzai; the Chief Adviser of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, His Excellency Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed; the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, His Excellency Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley; the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency Dr. Manmohan Singh; the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom; the Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the Rt. Hon'ble Girija Prasad Koirala; the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani; and the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, met at the Fifteenth Summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on August 2-3, 2008.

Regional cooperation

2. The Heads of State or Government reaffirmed their commitment to the principles and objectives enshrined in the SAARC Charter. They renewed their resolve for collective regional efforts to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development which would promote the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and improve their quality of life, thereby contributing to peace, stability, amity and progress in the region.

3. The Heads of State or Government recognized that SAARC has been making steady and incremental progress over the years, in particular since the last Summit, held in New Delhi in April 2007, towards realizing the objectives of the Charter. They accordingly emphasized the importance of maintaining the momentum, through clear links of continuity between the work already under way and future activities. The Heads of State or Government recognized the need for SAARC to further strengthen its focus on developing and implementing regional and subregional projects in the agreed areas on a priority basis. Each Member State may consider taking up at least one regional/subregional SAARC project as the lead country.

4. The Leaders noted with satisfaction the considerable progress made in various domains of partnership among SAARC Member States and emphasized the need to consolidate and ensure effective implementation of all SAARC programmes and mechanisms by rationalization and performance evaluation on a regular basis.

A Partnership for Growth for the Peoples of South Asia

5. The Heads of State or Government were convinced that the process of regional cooperation must be truly people-centered, so that SAARC continues to strengthen in keeping with expectations as a robust partnership for growth for the peoples of South Asia. They accordingly directed all SAARC mechanisms to abide by the Charter objective of promoting the welfare of the people and improving their quality of life. In this regard they directed the Council of Ministers to ensure that SAARC mechanisms identify further areas of cooperation where people-centric partnership projects could be initiated.

6. The Heads of State or Government observed that an effective and economical regional telecommunication regime is an essential factor of connectivity, encouraging the growth of people-centric partnerships. They stressed the need for the Member States to endeavour to move towards a uniformly applicable low tariff, for international direct dial calls within the region.

Connectivity

7. The Heads of State or Government recognized the importance of connectivity for realizing the objectives of SAARC. They accordingly directed the SAARC mechanisms to continue to embody in their programmes and projects a strong focus on better connectivity not only within South Asia, but also between the region and the rest of the world. They further stressed the necessity of fast-tracking projects for improving intraregional connectivity and facilitating economic, social and people-to-people contacts.

Energy

8. The Heads of State or Government noted that increased access to energy is critical for fulfilling the legitimate expectations of growth and development in South Asia. They observed in this regard that the escalation of oil prices threatens both the energy security of the region, as well as the economic growth witnessed in South Asia. In this context, they recognized the need to expeditiously develop and conserve the conventional sources of energy and to build up renewable alternative energy resources, including indigenous hydro power, solar, wind and bio, while introducing energy reforms, energy efficiency and the trade and sharing of technology and expertise. They also noted that there is tremendous potential for developing regional and subregional energy resources in an integrated manner and noted the efforts being made to strengthen regional cooperation in capacity development, technology transfer and the trade in energy. While expressing satisfaction at the progress over the recent years to strengthen energy cooperation, the Leaders directed that the recommendations of the Energy Dialogue be implemented through an appropriate workplan.

9. The Heads of State or Government stressed the urgent need to develop the regional hydro potential, grid connectivity and gas pipelines. They noted that the possibility of evolving an appropriate regional intergovernmental framework may be explored to facilitate such an endeavour. They welcomed Sri Lanka's offer to host the Third Meeting of SAARC Energy Ministers in Colombo in 2009.

Environment

10. Being increasingly aware of global warming, climate change and environmental challenges facing the region, which mainly include sea-level rise, deforestation, soil erosion, siltation, droughts, storms, cyclones, floods, glacier melt and resultant glacial lake outburst floods and urban pollution, the Heads of State or Government reiterated the need to intensify cooperation within an expanded regional environmental protection framework, to deal in particular with climate change issues. They were of the view that SAARC should contribute to restoring harmony with nature, drawing on the ancient South Asian cultural values and traditions of environmental responsibility and sustainability.

11. The Leaders expressed satisfaction at the adoption of SAARC Action Plan and Dhaka Declaration on Climate Change by the SAARC Environment Ministers at the SAARC Ministerial Meeting on Climate Change held at Dhaka on 3 July 2008. In this context they stressed the need for close cooperation for capacity-building, development of CDM projects and promotion of programmes for advocacy and mass awareness-raising on climate change. They also expressed satisfaction at the adoption of a SAARC Declaration on Climate Change for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) by the Twenty-ninth Session of the Council of Ministers.

12. The Heads of State or Government expressed deep concern over global climate change and its impact on the lives and livelihoods in the region. They also noted the urgency of the immediate need for dealing with the onslaught of climate change including sea level rise, on meeting food, water and energy needs, and taking measures to ensure the livelihood security of the peoples in the SAARC region. They resolved to work together to prevent and address the threats to the livelihoods of the peoples and to provide access to remedies when these rights are violated and also to find an equitable distribution of responsibilities and rights among the Member States. They also emphasized the need for assessing and managing its risks and impacts. In this regard, they called for an in-depth study on "Climate Justice: The Human Dimension of Climate Change," to come up with a rights-based approach that would highlight the human impact when responding to the impacts of climate change.

13. The Heads of State or Government affirmed that every citizen of this planet must have an equal share of the planetary atmospheric space. In this context, they endorsed the convergence of per capita emissions of developing and developed countries on an equitable basis for tackling climate change. They were of the view that any effort at addressing climate change should take into account historical responsibility, per capita emissions and respective country capabilities.

14. The Heads of State or Government expressed concern at the human loss suffered through natural disasters in the region and stressed the need for the timely provision of relief in humanitarian emergencies. In this regard they directed that a Natural Disaster Rapid Response Mechanism be created to adopt a coordinated and planned approach to meet such emergencies under the aegis of the SAARC Disaster Management Centre.

Water Resources

15. The Heads of State or Government expressing their deep concern at the looming global water crisis, recognized that South Asia must be at the forefront of bringing a new focus to the conservation of water resources. For this purpose they directed initiation of processes of capacity-building and the

encouragement of research, combining conservation practices such as rainwater harvesting and river basin management, in order to ensure sustainability of water resources in South Asia.

Poverty Alleviation

16. The Heads of State or Government while acknowledging the significant steps taken to alleviate poverty in the region, resolved to continue to combat poverty through all available means, including especially through people's empowerment. They committed themselves to continuing to share each other's experiences and success stories of pro-poor poverty reduction strategies such as microcredit systems, community-driven initiatives and the raising of the consciousness of the poor on their right to resources and development.

17. In this respect, they emphasized on undertaking sustained efforts, including developing and implementing regional and subregional projects towards the attainment of SAARC Development Goals (SDGs). They noted the decision by the Ministers on Poverty Alleviation to obtain an intergovernmental mid-term review of the attainment of the SDGs to be completed by 2009.

18. The Leaders welcomed the offer of Nepal to host next Ministerial Meeting on Poverty Alleviation.

SAARC Development Fund (SDF)

19. The Heads of State or Government expressed satisfaction at the signing of the Charter of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF), and finalization of its by-laws, and called for an early ratification of the SDF Charter. They also welcomed early operationalization of the Fund from the available funds. They expressed satisfaction at the launching and identification of the projects on women empowerment, maternal and child health and teachers' training under the social window of the SDF, as directed by the Finance Ministers. They reiterated their commitment to expedite their financial contributions to the Fund. In this regard, the Heads of State or Government accepted with appreciation the offer of the Kingdom of Bhutan to host the SAARC Development Fund Secretariat in Thimphu.

Transport

20. The Heads of State or Government expressed satisfaction at the progress through the Meetings of the Ministers of Transport. They reiterated the critical importance of an efficient multimodal transport system in the region for integration and for sustaining the region's economic growth and competitiveness. They urged early implementation in a gradual and phased manner of the proposals of the SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study (SRMTS).

21. They noted the progress made in the consideration of the draft Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) by Member States. They also noted that technical inputs related to Regional Transport and Transit Agreement and Regional Multilateral Railway Agreement were being examined by the Member States. In this context, they directed the next Transport Ministers Meeting to expedite work in this regard. They appreciated the offer of Sri Lanka to hold the Second Meeting of SAARC Ministers of Transport in Colombo in 2008.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Development

22. The Heads of State or Government urged the need for even more expeditious and close regional cooperation in information and communication technology. They welcomed the enhanced digital connectivity among the Member States and the ongoing work to upgrade the regional telecommunication infrastructure. They directed that the arrangements needed to implement the proposed collaborative tele-projects such as those for health care and education, be expedited.

Science and Technology

23. The Heads of State or Government acknowledged the ongoing contribution of Science and Technology including cutting edge technology in information and biotechnology in improving the quality of life of the peoples of South Asia. They noted the offer of India to host the Ministerial Meeting on Science and Technology on September 15-16, 2008 for development of a road map on identifying implementable focused regional and subregional projects in SAARC.

Tourism

24. The Heads of State or Government underscored the vital contribution that tourism could afford to the economic development of the SAARC region. They agreed to make every effort to implement the comprehensive action plan adopted by the Second Ministerial Meeting held at Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh. These efforts would include facilitating the movement of people through improved travel infrastructure and air, sea and land connectivity among the SAARC countries, collaboration in human resource development and the promotion of SAARC as a common destination through public-private partnerships and joint campaigns.

Culture

25. The Heads of State or Government emphasized the role of cultural connectivity in bringing the peoples of South Asia closer, while reinforcing and projecting a distinct South Asian identity. They directed that the Agenda for Culture be implemented in full.

SAFTA and Trade Facilitation

26. The Heads of State or Government emphasized their commitment to implement SAFTA in letter and in spirit, thereby enabling SAARC to contribute as well to the dynamic process of Asia's emergence as the powerhouse of the world. Recognizing the need to continue to address the major barriers hindering effective trade liberalization in the region, which include sensitive lists of items and Non-Trade Barriers (NTBs), they directed that the decision to revise the sensitive lists by the SAFTA Ministerial Council (SMC) be implemented early. They also recommended that while revising the Sensitive Lists, special consideration be given to the LDCs. The Leaders directed that SAFTA Committee of Experts (SCoE) to expeditiously resolve the issue of Non Tariff Measures (NTMs) and Para Tariff Measures (PTMs) in order to facilitate and enhance the trade under SAFTA.

27. The Heads of State or Government underlined the need for taking concrete measures to improve trade facilitation in terms of the mutual recognition of standards, the adoption of common tariff

nomenclatures, the harmonization of customs procedures. They directed the relevant SAARC bodies to expedite their work in these areas. They also recognized the importance of development of communication system and transport infrastructure and transit facilities specially for the landlocked countries to promote intra-SAARC trade.

28. The Heads of State or Government observed that the SAARC legal instruments on trade liberalization and the measures and initiatives for trade facilitation are increasingly affording significant openings for mutually beneficial trade, investments and economic cooperation within South Asia. These openings are complemented by the uniformly sound levels of national economic growth being attained by the Member States of SAARC. The Leaders accordingly noted the growing and urgent need for enhancing capacity within SAARC dedicated to encouraging national and regional strategies that would further maximize the positive trade, investments and economic cooperation climate in South Asia. In this regard they welcomed the offer of Sri Lanka to prepare a Concept Paper and a Working Paper on the subject and directed that the Paper be discussed at a Session of the Standing Committee specially convened for this purpose, to enable the adoption of appropriate follow-up measures.

29. The Heads of State or Government welcomed the signing of the text of the Agreement on the Establishment of the South Asian Regional Standards Organization. The Heads of State or Government welcomed the signing of the Protocol on Afghanistan for Accession to SAFTA.

Trade in Services

30. The Heads of State or Government expressed satisfaction at the conclusion of the Study on Trade in Services and welcomed the decision of SAFTA Ministerial Council to commence negotiation on the Framework Agreement on Trade in Services. Towards achieving further economic integration, they directed that the Draft Agreement on Investment Promotion and Protection be finalized early and the SAARC Arbitration Council be operationalized.

SAARC Social Charter

31. The Heads of State or Government underscored the imperative to make steady progress in the implementation of the SAARC Social Charter and directed the Member States to complete the National Plans of Action with a perspective of seeking to transform current challenges into opportunities. They further directed the National Coordination Committees (NCCs) to recommend activities in conformity with the Social Charter and to introduce an efficient and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism for reviewing the progress in the implementation of the Social Charter. The Leaders emphasized the need to implement the selected regional and subregional programmes and projects to complement national implementation efforts. They urged that such activities be suitably accommodated in the SAARC Calendar. They called for people's participation in strategy initiatives, planning and implementation to ensure people's responsibility and ownership. The Leaders directed to develop a policy on the protection of rights of the senior citizens for their geriatric care taking into account existing national policies of the Member States.

Women and Children

32. The Heads of State or Government noted with satisfaction the increased cooperation in the region towards achieving the all important goal of bringing women fully into the mainstream of development, on the basis of gender equality. They called for focused attention on women's economic empowerment and skills development, while addressing key health issues and violence against women. The Leaders directed to work for a regional cooperation for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and abuse against women in general and widows in particular and guarantee their rights to live in the society in a dignified manner.

Education

33. The Heads of State or Government welcomed the substantial progress made in the establishment of the South Asian University in New Delhi and directed that the University should begin its Session from 2010. They also directed that increased interaction between students should be encouraged through institutionalization of students, academics, teachers and youth exchange programs. They further directed early institutionalization of an elaborate SAARC Scholarship Scheme in ICT and related areas.

Combating Terrorism

34. The Heads of State or Government strongly condemned all forms of terrorist violence and expressed deep concern over the serious threat posed by terrorism to the peace, stability and security of the region.

35. They further recognized the growing linkages between the phenomenon of terrorism, illegal trafficking in narcotic and psychotropic substances, illegal trafficking of persons and firearms and underscored the need to address the problem in a comprehensive manner. They reiterated their commitment to strengthen the legal regime against terrorism, including by undertaking to implement all international conventions relating to combating terrorism to which Member States are parties, as well as the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and the Additional Protocol to the SAARC Regional Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism. The Heads of State or Government while recalling United Nations Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) emphasized the importance of criminalizing any act for the provision, collection and acquisition of funds for the purpose of committing terrorist acts.

36. The Heads of State or Government recognized in this regard the value of the proposed United Nations Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. They noted the progress made during recent rounds of negotiations and called for an early conclusion of the Convention.

37. They emphasized the need for strongest possible cooperation in the fight against terrorism and transnational organized crime amongst the relevant agencies of the Member States, especially in the area of information exchange. The Heads of State or Government further emphasized the importance of completing all legislative and other relevant measures to implement within Member States, the provisions of the Regional Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. The Leaders noted the considerable work done to promote cooperation in Police matters. They appreciated the

offer of Pakistan to host the Third Meeting of SAARC Ministers of Interior/Home in Islamabad during 2008.

38. The Heads of State or Government expressed satisfaction on the finalization of the text of the SAARC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters at the Fifteenth Summit and its signing. They expressed appreciation at the accommodating manner in which the negotiations were conducted by the Member States to provide each other the widest measures of mutual assistance in criminal matters to ensure a greater sense of security within the region. The Heads of State or Government urged for early ratification and implementation of the Convention.

Joint Positions

39. The Heads of State or Government resolved to encourage consultations among delegations of SAARC Member States at the appropriate international forums and agreed to cooperate accordingly.

Observers

40. The Heads of State or Government welcomed the Observers namely the People's Republic of China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mauritius, the United States of America and the European Union and appreciated their participation in the Summit. They also welcomed Australia and Myanmar to be associated as Observers to SAARC. They approved the guidelines for cooperation with Observers and looked forward to working with them in the common pursuit of the partnership for growth for our people.

Sixteenth Summit

41. The Heads of State or Government welcomed with appreciation the offer of the Maldives to host the Sixteenth Summit Meeting of the Heads of State or Government of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

Enclosure

Colombo Statement on Food Security

We, the heads of State or Government, participating in the Fifteenth SAARC Summit held in Colombo on 2–3 August 2008, affirm our resolve to ensure region-wide food security and make South Asia, once again, the granary of the world.

In view of the emerging global situation of reduced food availability and worldwide rise in food prices, we direct that an Extraordinary Meeting of the Agriculture Ministers of the SAARC Member States be convened in New Delhi, India in November 2008, to evolve and implement people-centred short- to medium-term regional strategy and collaborative projects that would, among others, lead to:

- Increase in food production;
- Investment in agriculture and agro-based industries;
- Agriculture research and prevention of soil health degradation;
- Development and sharing of agricultural technologies;
- Sharing of best practices in procurement and distribution; and
- Management of the climatic and disease-related risks in agriculture.

We direct that the SAARC Food Bank be urgently operationalized. We also emphasize early drawing up of the SAARC Agriculture Perspective 2020.

We further direct that SAARC region should forge greater cooperation with the international community to ensure the food availability and nutrition security in South Asia.

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Agenda item 64 (c)
Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives

Situation of human rights in Myanmar

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 62/222. On 22 May 2007, the Secretary-General designated his Special Adviser on the International Compact with Iraq and Other Political Issues and former Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, to continue to pursue the good offices on his behalf. During the reporting period, from 23 October 2007 to 5 September 2008, the Special Adviser visited Myanmar three times at the invitation of the Government, in November 2007, March 2008 and August 2008. On each visit, the Special Adviser was able to engage with representatives of both the Government of Myanmar and the opposition.

During his visits and in all his discussions with representatives of the Government, opposition and other stakeholders, the Special Adviser continued his efforts on behalf of the Secretary-General to promote national reconciliation, the restoration of democracy and respect for human rights in Myanmar, in accordance with the objectives of relevant General Assembly resolutions. To that end, the Special Adviser focused on the following five key areas of concern to the United Nations and the international community, as endorsed by the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General and in the Security Council: (a) the release of all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; (b) the need for an enhanced, substantive and time-bound dialogue between the Government and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; (c) the need for an inclusive and credible political transition process to civilian and democratic government; (d) avenues for improving socio-economic conditions, including through a broad-based national mechanism; and (e) ways to regularize the process of mutual engagement and cooperation through the good offices process.

* The present report is being submitted on 17 September 2008 so as to include as much up-to-date information as possible.

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In consultations with Member States, the Secretary-General and the Special Adviser also reiterated four guiding principles for the implementation of the Secretary-General's good offices mandate, namely: (a) the good offices are a process, not an event, and require sustained engagement through regular visits and consultations with all concerned; (b) the situation in Myanmar requires comprehensive engagement on a broad range of political, human rights, humanitarian and socio-economic issues; (c) engagement cannot be an end in itself, but must yield concrete results; and (d) the international community needs to continue to work together constructively in support of the goals of the good offices.

Following the designation, on 8 October 2007, of the Minister for Relations with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, they both met together five times between November 2007 and January 2008. This marked the first attempt at a dialogue between the Government and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi since 2003. In addition, for the first time in four years, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was allowed to meet twice with the Central Executive Committee of the National League for Democracy (NLD).

On 9 February 2008, the Government of Myanmar for the first time made public a time frame for the next steps in its political "road map" process towards the establishment of a civilian and democratic government, announcing that a national referendum on a draft constitution would be held in May 2008, followed by multiparty elections in 2010.

On 2 May 2008, cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar, leaving an estimated 140,000 people dead or missing, and an estimated 2.4 million people severely affected. In response to the cyclone, the Secretary-General visited Myanmar on 22 and 23 May 2008, marking the first visit to that country by a Secretary-General of the United Nations in 44 years. Following the Secretary-General's discussions with State Peace and Development Council Chairman Senior General Than Shwe, access for international aid workers was facilitated, and a Tripartite Core Group coordination mechanism was set up between the Government of Myanmar, the United Nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to facilitate an effective large-scale humanitarian response. On 25 May 2008, the Secretary-General returned to Myanmar to co-chair a joint high-level pledging conference in Yangon with the Government of Myanmar and ASEAN.

On 10 May 2008, the Government of Myanmar held a constitutional referendum as planned, despite the Secretary-General's call to it to dedicate all available resources to the emergency humanitarian response as a matter of priority. Voting was postponed to 24 May 2008 in the 47 townships most affected by the cyclone. On 29 May 2008, the Government announced that the draft constitution had been formally adopted, with a reported 92.48 per cent approval and 98.12 per cent turnout of voters.

On 27 May 2008, the Government of Myanmar extended the house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In a statement issued on the same day, the Secretary-General expressed his disappointment at the Government's decision and stressed that the release and ability of all political prisoners to take part in the political process remained at the forefront of discussions with the Government of Myanmar in the context of his good offices.

From 4 to 7 August 2008, the new Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, Tomás Ojea Quintana, made his first visit to Myanmar at the invitation of the Government. This followed a visit by his predecessor, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, in November 2007, at the behest of the Special Adviser, after four years without being granted access to the country. It also followed the adoption, on 28 March and 18 June 2008, by the Human Rights Council, of two resolutions (7/31 and 8/14) urging Myanmar, inter alia, to cooperate with the Special Adviser.

Following the official announcement of the adoption of a new Constitution, the Government of Myanmar has expressed its determination to proceed with multiparty elections by 2010, the fifth step in its seven-step road map. At the same time, a number of key stakeholders, including NLD, have formally stated their rejection of the new Constitution and the process by which it was adopted. Thus, despite the Government's efforts in implementing its road map process, the political situation in Myanmar has become even more complex and challenging, drawing increased attention from the international community. The Secretary-General and his Special Adviser have consistently emphasized that only a credible and inclusive political process — based on mutual understanding and compromise by all stakeholders — can help to advance the prospects of durable peace, national reconciliation, democracy and respect for human rights in Myanmar.

In this regard, the support of the international community, including countries in the region, for the good offices of the Secretary-General and the work of his Special Adviser continue to be essential to the continuation of those efforts. The Secretary-General welcomes and encourages the constructive role played by Myanmar's neighbours and ASEAN member States in support of his good offices and the work of his Special Adviser. He further welcomes the April 2008 conclusion by the European Council on Myanmar and the July 2008 statements by ASEAN, the Group of Eight, the East Asian Summit, and the ASEAN Regional Forum, which all expressed support for his good offices and for the continued efforts of his Special Adviser.

While the spirit of cooperation between Myanmar and the United Nations has been marked by improvement in recent months, including through the visits of the Secretary-General and of his Special Adviser, it remains a source of frustration that meaningful steps with tangible results have yet to be taken by the Myanmar authorities in response to the concerns and expectations of the United Nations and the international community in the context of the good offices process.

Ultimately, the future of Myanmar rests with the Government and people of Myanmar. The role of the United Nations is to ascertain the positions of all parties and facilitate their efforts to work together through dialogue towards a mutually acceptable process of national reconciliation and democratization, in full respect of Myanmar's sovereignty and in accordance with the expectations of the international community. Independently of any formal process, the political challenges of any transition to democracy require negotiated political solutions. As the country reaches a delicate juncture in its political development, there is no real alternative to a peaceful process of national reconciliation and now is the time for the Government and opposition alike to find ways to talk to each other and work together in the interest of the nation, with a view to advancing the shared objectives of peace, prosperity and democracy as the necessary foundations for long-term stability and development.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 62/222, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, inter alia, to continue to provide his good offices and to pursue his discussions on the situation of human rights and the restoration of democracy with the Government and the people of Myanmar, including all relevant parties to the national reconciliation process in Myanmar, to offer technical assistance to the Government in that regard, and to report to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, as well as to the Human Rights Council, on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution. The report focuses on the good offices dimension of the resolution covering the period elapsed since the previous report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly (A/62/498), from 23 October 2007 to 5 September 2008. A separate report by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar was circulated on 3 June 2008 under the symbol A/HRC/8/12.

2. Since the last report of the Secretary-General, further efforts have been made to engage the Myanmar authorities, as well as other key stakeholders, in an all-inclusive process towards national reconciliation, restoration of democracy, and respect for human rights through the good offices mandate entrusted to the Secretary-General by the General Assembly. During the reporting period, the Special Adviser visited Myanmar three times at the invitation of the Government: in November 2007, March 2008 and August 2008. On each visit, the Special Adviser was able to engage with representatives of both the Government of Myanmar and the opposition, as well as meet with the United Nations country team, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the diplomatic corps. Simultaneously, extensive consultations with key interested Member States have sought to build on the international community's broad support for the Secretary-General's good offices and the work of his Special Adviser.

II. Key developments

3. From 3 to 8 November 2007, the Special Adviser visited Myanmar in follow-up to his previous visit from 29 September to 2 October 2007, amid continued international concern in the wake of the peaceful demonstrations that took place in August-September 2007 and the subsequent repression by the Government. He met with Prime Minister General Thein Sein, Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council, Lieutenant-General Thiha Thura Tin Aung Myint Oo, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, U Nyan Win, the Minister of Information, Brigadier-General Kyaw San, and the Minister of Culture Major-General Khin Aung Myint, both as members of the State Peace and Development Council Spoke Authoritative Team and in their capacity as members of the newly appointed Constitution Drafting Commission. The Special Adviser also met with the Minister of Labour, Major-General Aung Kyi, as Minister for Relations with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as with the Ministers for Planning, U Soe Tha and Religious Affairs, Brigadier-General Thura Myint Maung. Separately, the Special Adviser met again with the NLD General Secretary, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and, separately, with the members of the NLD Central Executive Committee, including Chairman U Aung Shwe, Secretary U Lwin and Treasurer U Nyunt Wai. On 8 November 2007, at the request,

and on behalf of, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the Special Adviser released the first public statement by her since the beginning of her most recent house arrest in 2003.

4. From 11 to 15 November 2007, the Special Rapporteur for human rights, Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, visited Myanmar at the invitation of the Government and in response to Human Rights Council resolution S-5/1, in which the Council directed him to assess the current human rights situation, including the Government repression of demonstrations in August-September 2007. That was the first visit to Myanmar by the Special Rapporteur after four years of not being granted access to the country. Following his visit, the Special Rapporteur's preliminary findings were that Government agents had used excessive force against demonstrators. He reported that at least 653 persons were still detained, 74 were missing and at least 31 had been killed during the demonstrations. In a note verbale dated 9 December 2007 (A/HRC/6/G/14), the Government of Myanmar rejected the findings, claiming that the Government had "exercised utmost restraint" and that only 10 persons had been killed during the events.

5. On 4 December 2007, further to a request by the Government, the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Charles Petrie, concluded his assignment in Myanmar. In a prior statement, the Secretary-General expressed his disappointment at the decision by the Government and reaffirmed his full confidence in the United Nations country team and its leadership.

6. On 9 February 2008, the Government of Myanmar for the first time, made public a time frame for the next steps in its political "road map" process towards the establishment of a civilian and democratic government, announcing that a national referendum on a draft constitution would be held in May 2008, followed by multiparty elections in 2010. On 19 February 2008, the Government announced the finalization of its draft constitution, based on principles adopted by the National Convention, which completed its work in September 2007 after 14 years of intermittent sessions. On 26 February 2008, the Government established a Referendum Convening Commission, charged with organizing and conducting the planned referendum.

7. During his visit to Myanmar, from 6 to 10 March 2008, the Special Adviser met with, inter alia, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the State Peace and Development Council Spoke Authoritative Team, and members of the Referendum Convening Commission and the Constitution Drafting Commission, as well as with the Minister of Planning, U Soe Tha, and Minister of Health, U Kyaw Myint. He also met twice with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and with the NLD Central Executive Committee, as well as other political parties and civil society groups.

8. On 2 and 3 May 2008, Myanmar was struck by the powerful cyclone Nargis, which caused widespread destruction and loss of life, leaving an estimated 140,000 dead or missing. The Ayeyarwaddy Delta and Yangon Division were badly damaged, with some 2.4 million people severely affected, including by the loss of shelter, livelihood, and access to food and water. On 9 May 2008, the United Nations launched a flash appeal, requesting US$ 201 million to fund a large-scale operation to assist those affected by the cyclone. On 19 May 2008, the Secretary-General dispatched his Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes, to Myanmar to consult with the Government on ways to ensure access for humanitarian assistance and a coordinated response. On 22 and 23 May 2008, the Secretary-General visited Myanmar amid heightening

international concern over the fate of the cyclone victims and delayed access to affected areas for international relief agencies. Following the Secretary-General's meeting with the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, Senior General Than Shwe and other members of Myanmar's senior leadership, agreement was reached that Myanmar would allow free access to international aid workers. On 25 May 2008, the Secretary-General returned to Myanmar to co-chair a joint high-level international pledging conference in Yangon with the Government of Myanmar and ASEAN to secure pledges for emergency relief needs. On 10 July 2008, the United Nations launched a revised appeal, requesting a total of US$ 481.8 million to cover humanitarian needs following the cyclone until April 2009. As of 28 August, the revised appeal was 41 per cent funded. From 23 to 25 July 2008, the Emergency Relief Coordinator returned to Myanmar to follow up on his May visit in order to assess post-cyclone relief efforts. In addition, the Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Ms. Noeleen Heyzer, as well as other senior officials of United Nations agencies, visited Myanmar to assess the relief efforts.

9. On 10 May 2008, the Government of Myanmar held a referendum on the draft constitution as planned, despite calls from the Secretary-General to the Government to devote all available resources to recovery efforts following the destruction caused by cyclone Nargis. Voting was postponed until 24 May 2008 in the 47 townships most affected by the cyclone. On 29 May 2008, the Government announced that the draft constitution had been formally adopted, with a reported 92.48 per cent approval and 98.12 per cent turnout of voters.

10. On 27 May 2008, the Government extended the house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In a statement issued on the same day, the Secretary-General expressed his disappointment at the Government's decision and stressed that the release and ability of all political prisoners to take part in the political process remained at the forefront of discussions with the Government of Myanmar in the context of his good offices.

11. From 4 to 7 August 2008, the new Special Rapporteur for Human Rights, Mr. Tomás Ojea Quintana, made his first visit to Myanmar at the invitation of the Government. This followed the adoption by the Human Rights Council on 28 March and 18 June 2008, respectively, of resolutions 7/31 and 8/14 urging Myanmar, inter alia, to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and the Special Adviser. During his visit, the Special Rapporteur met with five prominent political prisoners in private at the Insein Prison. He also met, inter alia, with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Labour and Home Affairs, as well as the Chief of the Myanmar Police Force and representatives of the national human rights body. He met with three NLD Central Executive Committee members in private. Following the Special Rapporteur's visit, on 8 August 2008, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was allowed for the first time in four years to meet with her lawyer; this was followed by several subsequent meetings in August and September 2008.

12. A planned return visit to Myanmar by the Special Adviser in late May 2008, at the Government's invitation, was postponed due to the intervening cyclone Nargis. From 18 to 23 August 2008, the Special Adviser visited Myanmar again, and met with senior-level members of the Government, including the Prime Minister, the State Peace and Development Council Spokesperson Authoritative Team, the Minister for Relations with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the Ministers of Planning

and Health. In addition, the Special Adviser visited Kungyangon, one of the areas most affected by cyclone Nargis, and met with the Tripartite Core Group. The Special Adviser also met twice with the NLD Central Executive Committee, as well as with other political parties and civil society groups. Although arrangements were made for the Special Adviser to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, she did not attend the meeting.

13. In parallel to his direct engagement with the Government and other relevant parties in Myanmar, the Special Adviser continued his consultations with key interested Member States, with a view to building on the international community's broad support for the Secretary-General's good offices. During the reporting period, consultations with Government counterparts took place in Bangkok, Beijing, Brussels, Hanoi, Jakarta, New Delhi, Phnom Penh, Singapore, Tokyo, Vientiane, and Washington, D.C. As per usual practice, the Special Adviser briefed the President of the General Assembly on the outcome of each of his visits to Myanmar. On 18 December 2007, at the invitation of the President of the General Assembly, the Special Adviser briefed an informal plenary session of the General Assembly on the good offices.

14. On 19 December 2007, the Secretary-General convened and chaired the first meeting of the "Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Myanmar". Representing a broad range of views by key interested Member States, the Group provides an informal forum for the exchange of views and the development of a shared approach in support of the Secretary-General's good offices. The Group of Friends held four further meetings at the level of Permanent Representatives on 13 February, 18 March, 23 July and 12 September 2008. On 27 September 2008, the Secretary-General convened and chaired the first high-level meeting of the Group of Friends, with the participation of Ministers from several concerned countries as well as the Secretary-General of ASEAN and the High Representative of the European Union. At the conclusion of the high-level meeting, the Secretary-General, for the first time, issued a press statement summarizing the key elements of the discussion among the members of the Group.

15. At the request of the Security Council, the Special Adviser briefed the Security Council on his good offices efforts on 13 November 2007 and 18 March, 24 July and 11 September 2008. In addition to two press statements issued on 14 November 2007 (SC/9171) and 17 January 2008 (SC/9228), the Security Council adopted on 2 May 2008 a second[1] presidential statement (S/PRST/2008/13) underlining, inter alia, the need for the Government of Myanmar to establish the conditions and create an atmosphere conducive to an inclusive and credible process, including the full participation of all political actors and respect for fundamental political freedoms, while reaffirming its unwavering support for the Secretary-General's good offices mission and his Special Adviser. Also on 2 May 2008, the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations submitted a letter to the President of the Council (S/2008/289) objecting to the presidential statement and the Security Council's consideration of the matter.

16. Throughout the reporting period, increased demands on the good offices of the Secretary-General were met through capacity provided in part by extrabudgetary contributions. The Secretary-General would like to take this opportunity to thank

[1] The first was S/PRST/2007/37, adopted on 11 October 2007.

Norway, Italy and the European Commission for their respective financial contributions in support of his good offices. In order to sustain this capacity throughout 2009, the Organization should ensure that adequate resources are provided to the Office of the Special Adviser to support the continued implementation of the good offices mandate entrusted to the Secretary-General by the General Assembly.

III. Content and outcome of discussions

17. On each of his visits to Myanmar and in all his discussions with representatives of the Government, opposition and other stakeholders, the Special Adviser consistently pursued, on behalf of the Secretary-General, the following five-point agenda reflecting key concerns of the United Nations and the international community, as endorsed by the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General and the Security Council, and in accordance with the objectives of relevant General Assembly resolutions: (a) the release of all political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi; (b) the need for an all-inclusive, substantive and time-bound dialogue; (c) the need for an all-inclusive and credible political transition process to civilian and democratic government; (d) avenues for improving socio-economic conditions; and (e) ways to regularize the good offices process between Myanmar and the United Nations. Under each of these areas, the Special Adviser made specific suggestions for the consideration of the Government, the opposition and other stakeholders.

18. By the time the Special Adviser visited Myanmar in November 2007, the Government had taken a number of steps in response to suggestions made during his previous mission, with a view to relaxing the security measures imposed during the demonstrations of August-September 2007: curfews had been lifted, visible military personnel had been largely withdrawn from city streets and, according to the Government, some 2,700 persons that had been detained in the course of the demonstrations had been released. Following the designation, on 8 October 2007, of the Minister for Relations with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, at the Special Adviser's suggestion, the first of five meetings took place between them, marking the first attempt at a dialogue between the Government and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi since 2003. On 18 October 2007, the Government established a 54-member Constitution Drafting Commission, instead of a broad-based constitutional review mechanism as recommended by the Special Adviser following the completion of the National Convention in September 2007.

19. During his visit from 3 to 7 November 2007, the Special Adviser, while acknowledging the above-mentioned steps, emphasized in his discussions with Government interlocutors that a return to the status quo before the September crisis would be unsustainable for Myanmar and unacceptable to the international community. Amid ongoing reports of human rights abuses by the authorities and continued arrests and detention of persons for expressing political beliefs, the Special Adviser conveyed the concerns and expectations of the United Nations and the international community regarding the obligation of the Government of Myanmar to ensure the basic rights and fundamental freedoms of its citizens. In this regard, the Special Adviser stressed the need for the Government to take further steps to release the political prisoners and individuals arrested during the

demonstrations, as well as relax any outstanding security measures imposed during the crisis.

20. The Special Adviser further welcomed the designation of the Minister for Relations with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the fact that the two of them had started to meet. He encouraged the Government and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to engage in an enhanced, substantive and time-bound dialogue and offered his good offices to continue to facilitate such a dialogue. The Special Adviser also reiterated international concerns about the need for the Government's political road map process to be given a time frame and to be made more transparent and inclusive of all political stakeholders in the country. In particular, the Special Adviser stressed the need for the Government to address the legitimate concerns and reservations of all domestic constituents, including NLD and ethnic nationality groups. In this regard, he recommended that the Constitution Drafting Commission be enlarged to ensure the broadest possible representation of views from across the political spectrum, including those who had not participated in the National Convention, and that any draft text of the constitution be circulated as widely as possible to allow for a proper process of information and consultation. In addition, the Special Adviser encouraged the Government to consider the establishment of a broad-based national mechanism to identify and address the socio-economic conditions underlying the demonstrations of August-September 2007.

21. In response, the Government emphasized the unique and complex nature of Myanmar's political and economic situation and the Government's efforts to address the challenges facing the country, including through its seven-step political road map towards the establishment of civilian and democratic government. The Government stressed that the National Convention and the Constitution Drafting Commission ensured that the road map process would be broadly representative. The Minister for Relations and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi indicated separately to the Special Adviser their understanding that the dialogue initiated between them would continue based on regular discussions and notwithstanding any differences of view that might arise. The Minister for Relations also indicated that the Government would turn to the Special Adviser for help in overcoming any obstacles that might arise in the course of such dialogue. With regard to the Special Adviser's proposal for a mechanism to address socio-economic issues, the Government did not object to considering the idea of establishing a broad-based "national economic forum", while stressing that international sanctions were the main cause of any economic difficulties in the country.

22. At the conclusion of his mission on 8 November 2007, and with the Government's prior acquiescence, the Special Adviser issued a statement at the request, and on behalf of, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, in which she, inter alia, welcomed the appointment of the Minister for Relations and looked forward to further regular discussions with him, with a view to starting a meaningful and time-bound dialogue with the State Peace and Development Council leadership as soon as possible; expressed her commitment in the interest of the nation to cooperate with the Government in order to make the process of dialogue a success; pledged to give consideration in the dialogue to the interests and opinions of as broad a range of political organizations and forces as possible, in particular those of ethnic nationalities; and welcomed the necessary good offices role of the United Nations to help to facilitate efforts in that regard. That was the first public statement made by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi since she was put under house arrest in 2003. It followed an

announcement by the Government (No. 1/2007), on 4 October 2007 that the Senior General would personally meet Daw Aung San Suu Kyi if she declared to give up "her efforts for confrontation, utter devastation, and imposing all kinds of sanctions, including economic sanctions, against Myanmar". On 9 November 2007, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was permitted, for the first time in four years, to meet with the Central Executive Committee of her NLD party, the first of two such meetings. On the same day, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi also met for the second time with the Minister for Relations, which was followed by three more meetings between November 2007 and January 2008.

23. By the time the Special Adviser visited Myanmar again in March 2008, the potentially positive developments of the past two visits appeared to wane, as reports of arrests and human rights abuses continued. In particular, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's meetings with the Minister for Relations and with the NLD Central Executive Committee were discontinued. The announcement by the Government, on 9 February 2008, of its plan to hold a constitutional referendum in May 2008, followed by multiparty elections in 2010, marked a significant step, in that it was the first time that the Government offered a time frame for its political road map process, following the 14-year-long National Convention. However, the announcement by the Government, on 19 February 2008, that the draft constitution had been finalized by the Constitution Drafting Commission effectively closed avenues for input from other stakeholders.

24. During his visit to Myanmar from 6 to 10 March 2008, the Special Adviser encouraged the Government to make further efforts through tangible steps to demonstrate meaningful progress in the areas discussed during his previous visit. In particular, the Special Adviser conveyed to the Government the position and expectation of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi regarding the need for the dialogue to continue, and urged the Government to resume its discussions with her without delay and consider elevating the level of its interlocutor. The Special Adviser further encouraged the Government and the Constitution Drafting Commission not to forgo the opportunity of opening up the political process to more stakeholders, including NLD and others who had not participated in the National Convention and/or expressed serious reservations about the constitution-drafting process. At the very least, the Special Adviser recommended that the text of any draft constitution be distributed as widely as possible and sufficiently in advance of any referendum, so as to allow all stakeholders a proper period of reflection and consultation.

25. In his discussions with the Government and the newly appointed Referendum Convening Commission, the Special Adviser stressed the responsibility of the Government of Myanmar to establish the conditions and create an atmosphere conducive to a free and fair referendum, in accordance with international standards, including the full participation of all political actors and respect for fundamental political freedoms. In accordance with the General Assembly mandate, the Special Adviser held out the option, at the Government's request, of discussing the possibility of any technical assistance from the United Nations and independent observation of the process. Separately, the Special Adviser also reiterated to the Government the need for the establishment of a broad-based national economic forum to address socio-economic vulnerabilities.

26. Whereas the Government had expressed its readiness to consider the suggestions made by the Special Adviser in November, it did not respond positively

29. The international humanitarian response to the devastation caused by cyclone Nargis, which hit Myanmar on 2 and 3 May 2008, showed the readiness of the international community to provide assistance to Myanmar in its hour of need. Amid international concerns about Myanmar's initial reluctance to grant access to international aid workers, the Secretary-General stressed the need to separate the humanitarian response from political considerations, in order to be able to provide assistance to those in need as a matter of urgency. During his visit to Myanmar on 22 and 23 May, the Secretary-General reached agreement with Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council Senior General Than Shwe on the need for Myanmar to facilitate a large-scale international aid operation. This marked the first visit by a Secretary-General of the United Nations to Myanmar in 44 years.

30. The international humanitarian response was coordinated by the Tripartite Core Group, a unique mechanism established to combine national, regional and international resources and capacities by bringing together representatives of the Government of Myanmar, ASEAN, and the United Nations. Responding to donor requests, the Government facilitated access for aid workers and worked with the United Nations and ASEAN to jointly conduct a thorough assessment of the damage caused by the cyclone. On 21 July 2008, the Tripartite Core Group released the Post-Nargis joint assessment report, which provides a comprehensive multisectoral assessment of the damage caused by the cyclone and estimated short, medium and longer-term recovery needs at US$ 1 billion over a three-year period. On 21 July 2008, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting held in Singapore agreed that the mandate of the Tripartite Core Group should be extended for 2009, in order to continue the tripartite cooperation for recovery work.

31. The visit by the Special Adviser to Myanmar from 18 to 23 August 2008 was the first since cyclone Nargis and the constitutional referendum. In contrast to his previous visit, the Special Adviser's discussions with the authorities were conducted in a healthier spirit and stronger expression of the willingness on the part of the Government to cooperate with the good offices mission. With regard to the release of political prisoners, the Special Adviser stressed that this should be considered as a matter of priority for sick and elderly detainees, on humanitarian grounds, and for all those who may have contributions to make to the political process, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo, and leaders of ethnic political parties. In response, the Government recalled its past practice had been to apply an amnesty procedure, as appropriate, and that this could be considered again. The Special Adviser further stressed the importance, at this juncture of the political process, of resuming an enhanced, substantive and time-bound dialogue between the Government and the opposition as the only viable avenue for addressing outstanding political issues, including any issues arising from the constitutional referendum and the Constitution itself. For the first time, the Government explicitly recognized the potential role of the United Nations in facilitating such a dialogue, by requesting the Special Adviser to discuss with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD "points of agreement, points of disagreement, and points of convergence". The Minister for Relations with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi also confirmed that the dialogue started in November 2007 had not been terminated, but merely interrupted, in part owing to the organization of the referendum and the intervening cyclone Nargis.

32. With regard to the political process, the Special Adviser reiterated the necessity for the process to be as credible and inclusive as possible, and include the free and unfettered participation of all political actors and respect for fundamental

human rights, such as freedom of expression and assembly, so as to be acceptable both nationally and internationally. In accordance with the General Assembly mandate, the Special Adviser held out the option, at the Government's request, of discussing conditions and requirements for any technical assistance from the United Nations and independent observation of any electoral process. The Government indicated that, once established, a new electoral commission would be competent to consider such an option, although no timeline was given for the establishment of the commission. The Government also gave assurances that elections would be free and fair. For the first time, the Government also indicated its readiness to work with the United Nations in the context of good offices to identify areas of cooperation in the socio-economic field, and agreed to submit proposals to that end. In terms of process, the Government invited the Special Adviser to return soon to Myanmar and agreed to allow his staff to apply for a visa to visit Myanmar in between his visits.

33. The fact that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi did not meet with the Special Adviser, as arranged by the Government on this visit, was a source of disappointment, as it is inconsistent with all their meetings during each prior visit and with her stated commitment to the good offices role of the United Nations. The Special Adviser immediately requested that the programme of his visit be put on hold and made a number of specific suggestions for the Government to resolve the situation, including suggestions received from the NLD Central Executive Committee. At his request, the Special Adviser also held a second meeting with the NLD Central Executive Committee, at which it agreed with the Special Adviser's proposed approach to resolving the situation and endorsed the United Nations five-point agenda, except with regard to any discussions concerning the Government's planned election in 2010. In a note dated 18 August 2008, addressed to the Special Adviser, the NLD Central Executive Committee listed the following substantive demands: "(i) to get the right of review of the national Constitution (2008), which was unilaterally drafted and ratified by force by the authorities and which is not yet in force; (ii) to mediate for the solutions to the issues presently facing the country, such as political and constitutional problems, without addressing the topic of new election; (iii) to attempt to materialize a meaningful dialogue between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the State Peace and Development Council within one month; (iv) to get recognition for the result of the 1990 election in some way; and (v) to inform the authorities that NLD is ready to negotiate without preconditions any issues for national reconciliation".

34. The fact that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi did not meet with the Special Adviser on his last visit and that the Government could not resolve this situation during the visit prevented the Special Adviser from ascertaining and reporting her views on these and other matters, with a view to finding a mutually agreeable starting point for the resumption of the dialogue. While welcoming the Government's favourable consideration of the issues raised by the Special Adviser and its receptiveness to some of the specific suggestions made in that regard, the Special Adviser stressed that it was the expectation of the international community and the primary responsibility of the Government that Myanmar demonstrate, without delay, its stated commitment to the Secretary-General's good offices through meaningful tangible results. The Special Adviser also again insisted on the need for the Government to allow Daw Aung San Suu Kyi regular access to her doctor, stressing that it was the Government's responsibility to ensure that her health was not in jeopardy.

35. In a letter dated 2 September 2008, addressed to the Special Adviser, the Government of Myanmar informed him that, in follow-up to the Special Adviser's proposal, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi had been informed through her lawyer on 1 September of a proposal by the Government for a meeting between her and the Minister for Relations on 2 September. The Government indicated that while Daw Aung San Suu Kyi did not refuse to meet with the Minister for Relations, her response had been that, for the time being, she would not meet with anyone except her lawyer. The Government also informed the Special Adviser that it had offered to arrange a visit by her personal doctor, which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi had also declined at that time. Subsequently, the Government informed the Special Adviser of a second proposal by the authorities to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for a meeting between her and the Minister for Relations on 15 September. The Government indicated, and subsequent reports confirmed, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's response that she wished to meet with the Minister for Relations but not at that time. In letters dated 10 and 23 September 2008 to the Special Adviser, the Government further assured that "the Myanmar authorities are committed to the policy of national reconciliation and are willing for continued dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi".

36. On 23 September 2008, the Government of Myanmar announced the amnesty release of a number of prisoners, which included several political prisoners, notably Myanmar's longest serving prisoner of conscience, U Win Tin, and other senior members of NLD whose individual cases were the focus of discussions between the Special Adviser and the Myanmar authorities during his latest visit. In a statement on 24 September, the Secretary-General welcomed this development while reiterating that all political prisoners should be released and that all citizens of Myanmar should be able to enjoy political freedoms as necessary steps towards the process of national reconciliation and dialogue, and looked forward to any further action by the Government of Myanmar in this regard. On 25 September, however, one of the released political prisoners was rearrested.

37. In consultations held throughout the reporting period with key interested Member States, the Secretary-General and the Special Adviser reiterated the following key guiding principles for the implementation of the good offices mandate: (a) the good offices should be seen as a process, not an event; (b) the good offices need to yield tangible results; (c) it is important for all sides in the national reconciliation process to be willing to engage in substantive dialogue; (d) conditions need to be put in place for a credible, transparent and inclusive political process; (e) the good offices need to pursue a comprehensive approach addressing a broad range of political, human rights, humanitarian and socio-economic concerns; and (f) all key interested Member States need to work together constructively in support of the good offices process.

38. Although Member States differed in their assessment of the situation in Myanmar, they repeatedly expressed broad support for the Secretary-General's good offices and the efforts of his Special Adviser. On 9 July 2008, the Group of Eight issued a statement expressing concern about the political situation in Myanmar, calling for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, urging Myanmar to cooperate with the good offices, and noting that the Group was prepared to respond positively to political progress. On 20 July 2008, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers stressed the importance of the Secretary-General's good offices to help Myanmar to move forward, and on 21 July 2008, they urged Myanmar to take bolder steps towards a peaceful transition to democracy. On 22 July 2008, Foreign Ministers at the East

Asia Summit reaffirmed their continued support for the good offices, and the ASEAN Regional Forum on 24 July 2008, while recognizing that Myanmar was trying to address many complex challenges, urged it to continue working closely with the good offices.

39. At the conclusion of the high-level meeting of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Myanmar on 27 September 2008, the Secretary-General issued a press statement in which he noted that: members of the Group were unanimous in expressing continued strong support for his good offices and for their implementation through his Special Adviser; while noting the recent actions taken by the Government of Myanmar, members of the Group also further encouraged it to work more closely with and respond more positively to the good offices of the Secretary-General to address key issues of concern to the international community, especially the release of political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the initiation of an all-inclusive dialogue between the Government and the opposition; and members of the Group encouraged all parties in Myanmar to seize the opportunity of the good offices of the Secretary-General while stressing the responsibility of the Government of Myanmar to demonstrate its stated commitment to cooperation through further tangible results.

IV. Observations

40. The devastation caused by cyclone Nargis was matched in scale only by the unparalleled degree of international solidarity with the people and Government of Myanmar. This, in turn, resulted in an unprecedented level of cooperation between Myanmar and the United Nations in developing a coordinated humanitarian response with ASEAN and other partners. To both the Government of Myanmar and the international community, this experience showed the necessity and merits of engagement and cooperation over isolation and non-cooperation in order to address the needs of the people of Myanmar. Building on this collaboration, the United Nations is committed to continuing to work in partnership with the Government and people of Myanmar to address the broad range of challenges facing their country, based on mutual trust and confidence.

41. At the time of the Special Adviser's visit in November 2007, the Government had just completed the first step in its seven-step road map to democracy, the National Convention. By the time the Special Adviser returned to Myanmar in August 2008, the Government was preparing for the fifth step in its road map, namely, multiparty elections in 2010. At the same time, a number of key stakeholders, including NLD, have formally stated their rejection of the Constitution and the process by which it was adopted, and are reserving their position with regard to their participation in any election under the current circumstances. Thus, despite the Government's efforts in implementing its road map process and addressing the challenges facing the country, the political situation in Myanmar has become even more complex and challenging and potentially more polarized, drawing increased attention from the international community, including the Security Council.

42. The United Nations also remains concerned about ongoing reports of armed conflict and associated human rights abuses and humanitarian problems in ethnic minority areas, particularly in Kayin and Kayah States. Substantive talks leading to

the sustainable cessation of hostilities between the Government and those armed ethnic groups still actively fighting need to be concluded, with a spirit of compromise on both sides. Although the Government has reached ceasefire agreements with a majority of armed ethnic groups, those agreements have yet to be finalized to meet political and socio-economic aspirations, including formalizing disarmament plans that are acceptable to the parties, allowing international humanitarian access to ethnic nationality areas, and ensuring the full participation of ethnic nationality representatives in the national political process.

43. From experience gained around the world, the United Nations has learned that constitutional and electoral processes in any transitional context can have either a divisive or a unifying effect, depending on the level of preparation and the degree of domestic buy-in into the process. The Secretary-General and his Special Adviser have therefore consistently emphasized that only a credible and inclusive political process — based on mutual understanding and compromise by all stakeholders — can help to advance the prospects of durable peace, national reconciliation, democracy and respect for human rights in Myanmar. In this regard, it is unfortunate that specific suggestions of the United Nations to improve the credibility and inclusiveness of the political process have thus far not been taken up by the Government.

44. While the spirit of cooperation between Myanmar and the United Nations has been marked by improvement in recent months, including through the visits of the Secretary-General and of his Special Adviser, it remains a source of frustration that meaningful steps have yet to be taken by the Myanmar authorities in response to the concerns and expectations of the United Nations and the international community in the context of the good offices process. Having seen first hand the nature and complexity of the challenges facing Myanmar, the Secretary-General is aware of the need for the United Nations and the international community to apply determination and perseverance in helping Myanmar to address those challenges through incremental but tangible progress. Following his meetings with the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council Senior General Than Shwe, and other members of Myanmar's senior leadership in the capital city, Nay Pyi Taw, on 23 May 2008, the Secretary-General is determined to continue his good offices efforts through his Special Adviser. Expectations are high that the Government of Myanmar will start taking substantive action on the proposals made by the Special Adviser in the implementation of relevant General Assembly resolutions, in particular with regard to the release of political prisoners and meaningful dialogue with all relevant stakeholders. Laying the foundations for future stability and prosperity will also require further efforts to address the socio-economic conditions facing the people of Myanmar. While it is essential for the United Nations to be able to rely on the goodwill, flexibility and collaboration of all parties, it remains the primary responsibility of the Government of Myanmar to genuinely demonstrate its stated commitment to cooperating with the United Nations by working constructively through tangible results with the good offices process.

45. Any sustained engagement by the United Nations will also require the continued active support of a united international community, including especially the countries in the region. The world needs a peaceful and prosperous Myanmar that can contribute to the development of the region and play its rightful role in the international community. The Secretary-General therefore welcomes the constructive role played by Myanmar's neighbours and by the members of ASEAN

in support of his good offices and the work of his Special Adviser, and encourages them to intensify their efforts. He also encourages all key interested Member States to work constructively together in support of his good offices and the efforts of his Special Adviser. The more united the international community is, the better the prospects for arriving at the shared goals of peace, democracy, and prosperity for the people of Myanmar. In this regard, the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Myanmar provides a useful information forum to exchange views and develop shared approaches in support of his good offices. The continued implementation of the good offices mandate entrusted to the Secretary-General by the General Assembly will also require the Organization to ensure that needed resources are provided to the Office of the Special Adviser.

46. Ultimately, the future of Myanmar rests with the Government and people of Myanmar. The role of the United Nations is to ascertain and attempt to reconcile the positions of all parties and facilitate their efforts to work together through dialogue towards a mutually acceptable process of national reconciliation and democratization, in full respect for Myanmar's sovereignty and in accordance with the expectations of the international community. Independently of any formal process, the political challenges of any transition to democracy require negotiated political solutions. As the country reaches a delicate juncture in its political development, now is the time for the Government and opposition alike to find ways to talk to each other and work together in the interest of the nation, with a view to advancing the shared objectives of peace, prosperity and democracy as the necessary foundations for long-term stability and development. There is no alternative to dialogue to ensure that all stakeholders can contribute to the future of their country. In this regard, the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners will be key for the resumption of an enhanced, all-inclusive, substantive and time-bound dialogue.

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General Assembly
Sixty-third session
Item 15 of the provisional agenda*
The situation in the Middle East

Security Council
Sixty-third year

Identical letters dated 15 September 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I transmit to you herewith a statistical table of the air, sea and field violations committed by Israel during the month of August 2008 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, under item 15 of the provisional agenda, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Nawaf **Salam**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/63/150 and Corr.1.

08-50926 (E) 190908 220908

Annex to the identical letters dated 15 September 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Statistical table showing Israeli violations during August 2008

Air violations					*Land violations*					
Military jet	*Reconnaissance*	*Helicopter*	*Total*	*Sea violations*	*Military acts of aggression*	*Field violations*	*Breaches*	*Total*	*Overall total*	*Previous month's violations*
				Crossing of territorial waters, and firing of automatic-weapons rounds, flares and flare shells over territorial waters	Air raids, artillery shelling, shelling of military positions and important posts, attacks on and killing of civilians	Gunfire, launching of flare shells, dropping of artillery shells, infiltration and crossing of international borders	Threats and display of weapons, bulldozing of soil, placing of barbed wire and setting up of installations inside Lebanese territory			
15	**26**	**1**	**42**	**1**	**—**	**18**	**—**	**18**	**61**	**99**

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Identical letters dated 15 September 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

On instructions from my Government, I transmit to you herewith a statistical summary of the violations committed by Israel from 22 to 31 August 2008 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, under item 15 of the provisional agenda, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Nawaf **Salam**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/63/150 and Corr.1.

08-50919 (E) 190908 190908

Annex to the identical letters dated 15 September 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council

Subject: Israeli violations, acts of aggression and other activities from 22 to 31 August 2008, inclusive

Air violations

On 23 August 2008 between 2050 and 2310 hours, an enemy Israeli reconnaissance aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering over the sea off Tyre. It circled the area between the South and Beirut, over land and sea, before departing over Rumaysh.

On 25 August 2008 between 0035 and 0040 hours, an enemy Israeli helicopter circled over Lebanese territorial waters off Naqurah.

Between 0035 and 0235 hours, an enemy Israeli reconnaissance aircraft flying at low altitude circled the areas of Naqurah, Marwahin and Bint Jubayl.

On 26 August 2008 between 1110 and 1230 hours, two enemy Israeli military aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering from over Rumaysh. They circled over all regions of Lebanon before departing over Naqurah.

Between 1935 and 2015 hours, an Israeli reconnaissance aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering from over Rumaysh and flying north to the area above Nabatiyah. It circled over the South before departing over Kafr Killa.

Between 2040 and 2235 hours, an enemy Israeli reconnaissance aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering over Aytarun and flying north. It circled over the South before departing over Kafr Killa.

On 27 August 2008 between 1100 and 1250 hours, four enemy Israeli military aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering over the occupied Shab'a Farms. They circled over all regions of Lebanon, carrying out mock attacks over Ghassaniyah and Kawthariyat al-Siyad before departing over Alma al-Sha'b.

On 28 August 2008 between 0630 and 1240 hours, an enemy Israeli reconnaissance aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering over Naqurah and flying north. It circled over all regions of Lebanon before departing over Rumaysh.

Between 1100 and 1236 hours, two enemy Israeli military aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering over Rumaysh and circling over all regions of Lebanon before departing over Alma al-Sha'b.

On 29 August 2008 between 1050 and 1450 hours, an enemy Israeli reconnaissance aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering from over Naqurah and flying north. It circled over the South and Beirut before departing over Rumaysh.

Between 1720 and 2315 hours, an enemy Israeli reconnaissance aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering from over Rumaysh and flying north. It circled over the South before departing over Rumaysh.

On 30 August 2008 between 0655 and 1415 hours, an enemy Israeli reconnaissance aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering over Alma al-Sha'b. It circled over the South before departing over Naqurah.

On 31 August 2008 between 1003 and 1100 hours, four enemy Israeli military aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering over the Shab'a Farms and circling over all regions of Lebanon before departing over Alma al-Sha'b.

Between 0807 and 2300 hours, an enemy Israeli reconnaissance aircraft violated Lebanese airspace, entering over Aytarun and flying north as far as Baalbek. It circled between Baalbek and Riyaq and then over Beirut before flying south. After circling over the South, it departed over Naqurah.

Attacks on the ground

On 24 August 2008 between 0745 and 0845 hours, enemy Israeli forces at the Radar outpost in the occupied Shab'a Farms directed several bursts of medium machine-gun fire at the surrounding area.

At 1515 hours, an enemy Israeli patrol consisting of 12 troops approached the Blue Line near Saddanah, on the paved road, and called loudly to the herders, ordering them to leave the area, which they forced them to do. At 1525 hours the hostile patrol departed.

On 28 August 2008 between 1945 and 2030 hours, the Israeli enemy at the Sammaqah position in the occupied Shab'a Farms directed several bursts of light and medium machine-gun fire at the surrounding area.

On 30 August 2008 at 1600 hours, on the outskirts of Shab'a/Hasbayya, while Imad Atawi was herding livestock some 10 metres from the withdrawal line, enemy Israeli troops from within the occupied Shab'a Farms, near the Saddanah position, hailed him. He left his flock and fled towards his village, whereupon enemy troops seized some 100 goats and held them for one hour.

Other Israeli activities

On 27 August 2008 between 1730 and 1845 hours, Israeli enemy troops discharged several rounds of medium machine-gun fire, and heavy plant was observed moving at the Israeli enemy Radar position in the occupied Shab'a Farms.